

## Mass Lung & Allergy, PC

# Animal Allergy

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### Allergen Avoidance

The best avoidance measure for a pet allergy is to remove the animal from the house. However, many people are emotionally attached to the pet and are unwilling to do so. In this case, there are some actions that are recommended to cut down on the amount of allergen in the home:

Remove the pet from the bedroom, and keep the animal off of furniture and outdoors as much as possible.

Have someone else bathe the pet at least once per week, especially if the animal is large.

Consider removal of carpeting from the bedroom and other common areas of the home.

Vacuum the carpet and floors frequently; ensuring the vacuum cleaner should be equipped with a HEPA filter.

Consider purchasing a HEPA filtered air cleaner for the bedroom.

If the pet is removed from the home, it is important to steam clean all carpeting and upholstered furniture, and launder draperies and bedding.

Household pets are the most common source of allergic reactions to animals. 15-30% of people with allergies have an allergy to dogs, cats, or other animals. Cats are the most common cause for pet allergies and approximately 10 million people in the United States are allergic to cats. Pet allergies are caused by an immune system response to proteins present in the animal. Many people assume that they are allergic to their pet's fur. Actually, the culprits are proteins in pet dander and dried saliva and urine. Dander occurs naturally as the epidermis, or the outer layer of skin, renews itself. The epidermis is made up of many layers of cells which are constantly pushing upward to replace the cells above. As this occurs, the outer cells die and flake off into the environment as

dander. It has been found, incidentally, that the epidermal turnover is more rapid in breeds that are groomed frequently and especially in breeds that are prone to various forms of dry and oily seborrhea. Saliva and urine are also potential sources of allergens. They are deposited on the fur through licking and urination. More people are allergic to cats than dogs, probably because cats spend more time indoors and bathe themselves with their saliva. Since dander is very small and light, it can attach itself to your clothes when you are away and ride back into your home undetected. It can also come in on the clothes of your children or guests. Animal dander has been found in many public places, like school classrooms, in quantities high enough to cause an allergic reaction.

Many homes without pets have been tested, and similar results have been found. If you have moved into a home where a pet has lived, it will take a year or more for all of the dander to lose its potency. So even if you don't have a cat in your home you can react as if there is one. Some rodents, such as guinea pigs and gerbils, have become increasingly popular as household pets. They, too, can cause allergic reactions, as can mice and rats. Urine is the major source of allergens from these animals.



## Animal Allergy Myths and Realities

- **Myth:** Some breeds of animals are non allergenic.
- **Reality:** Since dander is produced within a cat or dog's skin and they all have skin, there are no breeds that are non allergenic.
- **Myth:** Only indoor pets cause allergies.
- **Reality:** There are many different animals that can cause allergic reactions, not just your dog, cat or hamster. Outdoor animals such as horses, cows, pigs or chick-

ens also cause a reaction due to their hair or living areas which are mainly enclosed.

- **Myth:** Continuous exposure to animals will desensitize you to them.
- **Reality:** If you are allergic to an animal, continuous exposure will not decrease your allergy. In fact, 1 in 3 people who have other allergies and are exposed to indoor pets will become allergic to them as well over time.

- **Myth:** A shorter hair animal causes less allergic reaction.
- **Reality:** Allergy has little to do with the length of fur (or hair) on the animal. Even though short haired animals shed less, they still produce the same amount of dander, which is the real cause of the pet allergies.
- **The Truth:** Male cats produce more allergen than female cats. Some breeds of dogs produce dog allergen faster than others.