

Pacific Animal Foundation

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FAMILY PETS and BABIES

by Lana Simon

One of the types of calls that animal rescue groups sometime receive goes along the lines of "We have a new baby in the house and we need to give up our dog (or cat). He's a really good dog (or cat) and we've had him since he was a puppy (or kitten) but now we have a baby. Will you please take him because we don't want to put him down." It is a heartbreaking message to hear.

New parents are often concerned about a level of cleanliness in the house or exposure of a baby to an animal. However, a new study titled "Respiratory Tract Illnesses During the First Year of Life: Effect of Dog and Cat Contacts" was published in the Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics in July 2012 and its findings may help new parents decide to keep Fluffy or Fido.



Petey the pooch cuddles with Charlie

The study goes on to say that there are indications that if children are exposed to cats and dogs in their first year of life, the research suggests that the exposure seems to help their immune systems develop, which the study showed meant less chance of ear infections, coughs, and rhinitis, and less use of antibiotics. The findings also indicated that any infections appeared to have a shorter duration.

The study results also suggest that children with exposure to animals during their first year of life were actually healthier than households from a pet-free environment.

According to the research, households with dogs or cats seemed to provide a protective factor from respiratory tract infections, although the percentage of protection was slightly lower in feline households. The article made reference to previous studies that stated exposure to cats may have a beneficial factor in reducing wheezing during baby's first year as well as for croup with older children.

Another interesting observation was that having pets who spent time outdoors seemed to have an even greater beneficial increase in good health for children. Researchers speculated that this might be because more dirt was brought into the household and that this exposure to it may have stimulated the children's immune systems to mature faster.

Dr. Danelle Fisher, vice-chair of pediatrics at St. John's Health Centre in Santa Monica, although not involved in this particular study, indicated that the study results showed support that exposing children to pets early in life can provide babies with

an advantage to help their immune systems strengthen and fight off infections.

This is all welcome news for both family pets and the rescue groups! If you have a newborn and a family pet, check out all the latest information on the internet on this subject before making any decisions on Fluffy and Fido.



** Sources:

Respiratory tract illnesses during the first year of life: effect of dog and cat contacts

Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics - July 2012

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/130/2/211.full.pdf+html?sid=d5b19417-130e-42e3-8474-f7f95b2da922>

Dogs and cats help babies' health, study finds

Los Angeles Times - July 2012

<http://articles.latimes.com/2012/jul/09/science/la-sci-dogs-cats-babies-health-20120709>



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