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Letter to Editor

How Risky is this Cat's "Gift"? -

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KEYWORDS

Veterinary; Cat; Feline; Mouse; Rodent; Parasite; Disease transmission; Deworming

A cat may present a mouse or rat as a “gift” to his owner as a token of appreciation. While this gesture represents normal feline behavior, a rodent may be afflicted with a plethora of viruses, bacteria, parasites, or toxins that may pose significant risks to the cat and his owners. Toxoplasmosis represents one of the most widespread parasitic diseases that may have detrimental consequences in pregnant women and individuals with weakened immune systems [1,2]. Other infectious concerns include the roundworm parasite, leptospirosis bacteria, and hantavirus. The common message that permeates the literature is to restrict cats to their home without the ability to prowl outside, thereby minimizing the likelihood of exposure to rodents.

A 5 year old indoor-only black cat presented a “gift” to his owner, specifically, four mouse fetuses that were regurgitated by the cat following the consumption of a pregnant mouse (Figure 1). Three of the fetuses remained in their amniotic sacs, while the fourth fetus was disengaged from the amniotic sac. The cat underwent fecal testing which revealed negative findings, and he was administered a single dose of 24.0 mg emodepside/96.1 mg praziquantel (Bayer; Whippany, NJ). This cat experiences vomiting and diarrhea several times per week due to ingesting numerous mice over his lifetime that enter his home through the crawl space.

Owners of indoor-only cats should be aware that their felines may be exposed to the same risks associated with rodents as outdoor cats.

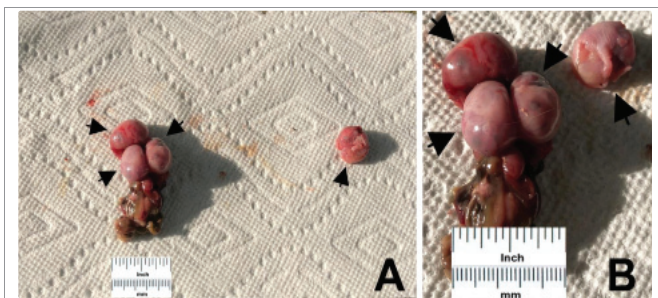


Figure 1: (A, B) Four mouse fetuses marked by an arrowhead that were regurgitated by a cat following the consumption of pregnant mouse. Three of the fetuses remained in their amniotic sacs, while the fourth fetus was disengaged from the amniotic sac.

Year-round flea and tick prevention are strongly encouraged for cats who only live inside, and rodenticides must never be placed in the home [3,4]. Interestingly, Stull and colleagues reported that only 68% of veterinarians have a small animal deworming protocol, although only 78% follow the protocol [5]. Only 44% of veterinarians discuss zoonotic risks of animal-derived endoparasites with all clients, whereas the remainder mention it under a particular circumstance or not at all [5].

The aim of this Letter to the Editor is to educate indoor cat owners about the potential perils that lurk in their own homes. Rodents often enter old homes through a crawl space and multiply exponentially. Homeowners often try to eradicate rodents with a rodenticide which is toxic for cats. Veterinarians should educate their clients with indoor-only cats about the vital need for life-long routine deworming to prevent devastating rodent-related infections.

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