

PRESS RELEASE

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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CLEAN BIRD FEEDERS TO HELP PREVENT ILLNESS IN YOUR PETS AND WILD BIRDS

**By the Vermont Veterinary Medical Association
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It's been a long cold winter for all of us, especially for wildlife. Food is scarce, and birds, including cardinals, goldfinches, sparrows, pine siskins, and song birds are especially vulnerable to disease at this time of year. Our feeders have been outside, freezing and thawing and the moisture and the inevitable debris and feces from wild birds feeding provide a harbor for a troublesome bacteria: Salmonella. As the snow melts, dogs especially are likely to contact or eat seed or waste that is infected.

Salmonella is a bacteria that is common throughout the world, and all animals can become infected with it. We often think of the warnings associated with cooking poultry when it comes to Salmonella, but wild birds can be infected with the bacteria and shed it in their feces, even if they appear healthy. Dogs and cats can be infected from eating birds, seeds, or droppings contaminated with Salmonella. In fact, infection from this bacteria is often called the "song bird's revenge" resulting when cats become sick from Salmonella after killing and eating a wild bird. Signs of infection in dogs and cats include vomiting, diarrhea, and dehydration. While it is unusual for dogs and cats to become sick from Salmonella, they can harbor the bacteria while appearing healthy. The reason we should be concerned about this is because Salmonella is a zoonotic disease. That is, we can be infected from our pets and become seriously ill.

Black bears will soon be emerging from their winter dens in Vermont, looking for food sources. Removing your bird feeders now will avoid tempting the bears and also help prevent disease in your pets and your backyard birds. Scrub out your bird feeders every couple weeks with non-toxic soap and water, and allow them to dry well. Mold can grow in the bottom of the feeder, too, which is quite toxic to birds. Clean up the seed and droppings from under the feeders and prevent dogs from contacting it. Wash your hands well after the clean-up. These simple acts can help protect your pets, back yard wildlife, and you from being infected with Salmonella.

Black bears will soon be emerging from their winter dens in Vermont, looking for food sources. Removing your bird feeders now will prevent attracting a bear to your home with

the temptation of birdseed.

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The Vermont Veterinary Medical Association (VVMA), founded in 1898, is a professional organization of 340 veterinarians dedicated to compassionate animal care and quality medicine.