

**4-H at  
HOME**



► To discover a wide selection of 4-H activities and experiences, visit [4-H.org/4HatHome](https://4-H.org/4HatHome)

# SICK OR WELL: HOW CAN YOU TELL?

Similar to people, animals also have signs to let us know when they're under the weather. Can you recognize them?



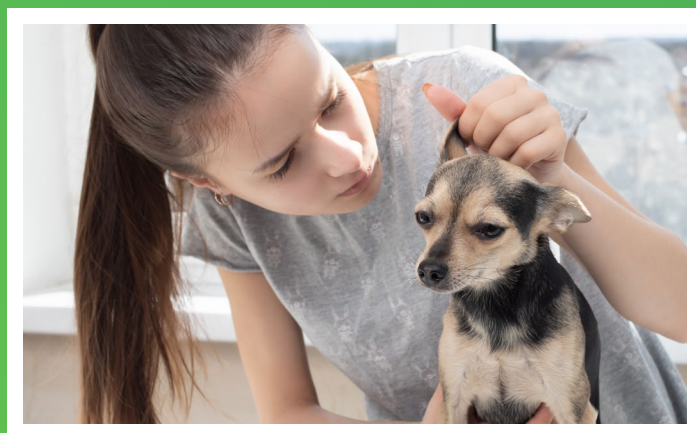
# Sick or Well: How Can You Tell?

Similar to people, animals also have signs to let us know when they're under the weather. Can you recognize them?

## About the Activity

*This is the third in a four-part educational series about preventing and treating illness in animals. You can see the other activities on [4-H Veterinary Science on 4-H at Home](#).*

When we're sick, our body and mood have ways of showing us and the people around us that we aren't well. Animals do this too. Using the downloadable symptom chart attached to this page, kids will observe and examine their pets for symptoms that may indicate they may be sick. Most likely your pets feel fine, but the lesson works just fine either way. Note that this activity will work best with a cat or a dog – but if you don't have any pets at all, you can walk through these activity steps and make note of the symptoms that demonstrate illness and those that don't.



## Supplies

**These simple materials will get you started:**

- A pet, preferably a dog or a cat
- A pen or pencil
- The downloadable symptom chart attached to this activity
- A flashlight
- *Optional: Pet treats or comfort toys*

## Grades: 6-8

**Topic:** Animal Science

**Time:** 30-60 minutes

## Activity Steps

Follow these steps to conduct an examination of your cat or dog.

- 1 To begin this activity, find a comfortable space to conduct your examination. Pets can be squirmy and skittish, so it's best to have your space set up before bringing your pet into the examining room.

**DID YOU KNOW:** It's important for pets to have regular exams, even when they seem healthy. This is like when you go to the doctor for a checkup. Regular exams can **help to detect potential health issues** early on. There are other preventative measures your veterinarian may recommend for your pet, as well, such as vaccinations. These are important for preventing **certain diseases** like rabies.

- 2 Once your examination space is set up, it's time to bring in your patient. Placing a toy or comfort object by your pet may help to keep them still and calm. Depending on the temperament of your animal, you may want to ask a helper to hold them while you conduct your exam.

- 3 Now, use the downloadable symptom chart and the questions in it to guide your exam. Put a check in the appropriate box. This may require some critical thinking. For example, is it a healthy sign when a cat has a slightly moist nose?

**TIP:** Some of the symptoms you're looking for aren't cut and dry. If your cat has watery eyes sometimes, and they do when you observe them, they may be fine. But if your cat rarely or never has watery eyes and does when you observe them, they may be sick. Some of these require you to use your best judgement – just as a veterinarian would do.

**NOTE:** If you mark sick for any of the below observations, talk to your grownup about calling your pet's veterinarian.

## Symptoms Charts

If you don't have a pet, put a check next to whether you think each symptom or sign would refer to a healthy or sick cat or dog.

Ears, Eyes, Nose, and Throat	Healthy	Sick	Notes
Mouth is pink and moist (healthy)			
Eyes are dull, dry and sunken (sick)			
Cat scratches ears and shakes head often (relative)			
Nose is clear and slightly moist (healthy)			
Wheezes, coughs or pants a lot (sick)			
Nose or eyes have discharge (relative)			
Other			

# Symptoms Charts (Continued)

Body and Limbs	Healthy	Sick	Notes
Limps or has swollen legs (sick)			
Body appears very thin or overweight (relative, but likely sick)			
Sleek and glossy coat (healthy)			
Breathes quietly; can barely hear it (healthy)			
Runny or bloody stools (sick)			
Moves quickly and with energy (healthy)			
Other			

Behavior	Healthy	Sick	Notes
Hides; doesn't want to play (relative)			
Frequent litter box or bathroom use—more than 10 times per day (sick)			
Has accidents (sick)			
Eats too much or not at all (sick)			
Playful, content, alert attitude (healthy)			
Urinate a clear, yellow fluid an appropriate number of times per day (typically 2-4) (healthy)			
Sleepy, grumpy or restless (relative)			
Other			
Other			



# Test Your Knowledge

## How much did you learn about the immune system?

### QUESTION 1

**True or false?** Animals do not need to see a veterinarian if they are healthy.

- a. True
- b. False

### QUESTION 2

**True or false?** An animal's behavior can help determine if it is healthy.

- a. True
- b. False

### QUESTION 3

**Animals receive vaccines to:**

- a. Get rid of diseases they may already have
- b. Be like people
- c. Avoid catching contagious and dangerous illnesses
- d. Make their pet owners happy

### QUESTION 4

**Which of the following is a sign of a sick cat or dog:**

- a. A slightly moist nose
- b. Urinates regularly, but not too frequently
- c. A lean body that is not too skinny
- d. Runny or bloody stool

### QUESTION 5

**Which of the following is a sign of a healthy cat or dog:**

- a. A slightly moist nose
- b. Wheezing or coughing
- c. Bloody stool
- d. Little or no appetite



## Reflection Questions

### Questions to deepen wonder and understanding

- Why does an animal's behavior tell us how it is feeling?
- When was the last time your pet went to the veterinarian? Was it for a sick or a well visit?
- What are some things you could do to help improve your pet's health? Be sure to check with your grownup/veterinarian before taking action.
- How does your pet act when it is feeling good? How do you think it would act in comparison if it were sick?



# Investigate & Explore

## Take your new knowledge to the next level.

Ask your grownup if you can accompany them the next time they take your pet for a checkup. If pet owners are allowed to accompany their animals, observe how the vet carries out the exam. Ask questions about what the vet sees or hears throughout the exam.

If you are not allowed in the examination room, ask your vet some questions about your pet's health before the exam and see how they report back.

Regardless of which option works for you, discuss what you learned after the exam!

*This is the third in a four-part educational series about preventing and treating illness in animals.*

***To see the other activities in this series, visit our Stopping Sickness activities page.***

Brought to you by:



TEXAS A&M  
AGRI LIFE  
EXTENSION