

Natalie DiBlasio, USA TODAY 6:52 p.m. EDT May 7, 2013

*A new study shows that certain states offer dogs and cats a better chance at a long, healthy life.*



*(Photo: 2008 photo by Mark Levy, Sierra Vista Herald, via AP)*

#### STORY HIGHLIGHTS

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- **In warmer states, pets live outside and are more susceptible to disease and risk**
  - **Louisiana and Mississippi offer the shortest life spans for dogs and cats**
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- **Neutered and spayed dogs live longer than their non-"fixed" counterparts**

Some dogs sleep outside and guard the house. Others have wardrobes and spend their day in a purse.

A new study shows that dogs and cats have a better chance at a long, healthy life in some states than in others. Louisiana and Mississippi offer the shortest average life span for dogs and cats, while pets in Colorado and Montana live longer, according to the 2012 State of Pet Health Report released by Banfield Pet Hospital, the world's largest veterinary practice.

Experts say states with the longest-living pets also have the highest neutering and spaying rates, more pets living inside and fewer regional infectious diseases.

"It's all about lifestyle, what your pet means to you and how you take care of them," says veterinarian Sandi Lefebvre. "There are different attitudes, different levels of education and they tend to cluster in certain areas of the country."

Cats live the longest in Montana, Colorado, Rhode Island, Illinois and Nebraska. Their life spans are shortest in Delaware, Ohio, Louisiana, Kentucky and Mississippi.

States with the longest life span for dogs are South Dakota, Montana, Oregon, New Mexico and Colorado. As for the shortest: Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Delaware and Maryland. Southern states have high rates of

heartworm because of heat and mosquitoes. Northeastern states are most likely to have Lyme disease because of the ticks that carry the disease.

In warmer states, more pets live outdoors where they are susceptible to these diseases. If they haven't been neutered or spayed they will have more aggressive behaviors, Lefebvre says. "They are out roaming, fighting, looking for partners."

Because of the roaming, non-neutered dogs are more than twice as likely to be hit by a car or bitten by an animal than neutered dogs. Non-neutered cats are four times more likely to be hit by a car and three times more likely to suffer an animal bite, the study shows.

In the North, pets are more likely to be indoors. "You do not want a sexually intact cat in your home," Lefebvre says. "It howls, pees all over the place, so spaying and neutering is obviously important."

Adonica Jones-Parks, 45, of Cincinnati, says she learned the hard way: "When I had my first cat, I did not have him neutered, and he was spraying everywhere, and then he ran off for a few days. Now I know it calms them down."

Nearly 20% of the cats in Louisiana and Mississippi aren't spayed or neutered. In Montana and Colorado, states with the longest life spans, that number is closer to 8%.

Neutered male dogs live 18% longer than non-neutered males; spayed female dogs live 23% longer than unspayed female dogs, according to the report. "But even if a pet is spayed or neutered, it still needs shots, training, nutrition, dental care and parasite control to live a long, healthy life," Lefebvre says.