

## What is “Cat Scratch Disease” or “Cat Scratch Fever?”

Cat Scratch Disease, sometimes also known as Cat Scratch Fever, is a disease in people caused by a bacteria inoculated through a scratch, bite, or other saliva contact from a cat.

## What causes the disease?

A couple of different types of bacteria have previously been implicated as the cause of Cat Scratch Disease, but a bacterium called *Bartonella henselae* is now considered to be the primary cause of Cat Scratch Disease. Most cats that are infected with *Bartonella henselae* have no symptoms of illness.

## What cats are more likely to carry the disease and how do cats become infected?

Cats less than a year of age and infested with fleas are the most likely animals to carry *B. henselae* bacteria. The bacteria appear to be spread from cat to cat by fleas.

## What are the symptoms of this disease in humans?

Most persons who develop Cat Scratch Disease first have a red nodule present at the site of a bite, scratch, or lick from a cat. This is generally accompanied by a fever, headache, muscle soreness, and fatigue. Within two weeks, a lymph node in the area of the bite or scratch becomes very swollen and painful and may ulcerate and drain fluid. Although uncomfortable, most cases will resolve without specific medical treatment in four to six weeks. However, in persons with severe immune system deficiencies, particularly HIV infection, the disease can be severe and even fatal. Disease complications in the immunosuppressed include systemic infection and conditions affecting the liver, spleen, or skin.

## What is the treatment for Cat Scratch Disease in humans?

Cat Scratch Disease is usually a self-limited illness that does not necessarily require antibiotic treatment. For patients suffering severe complications of *B. henselae* infection, antibiotics are necessary to clear the infection.

## What can I do to prevent Cat Scratch Disease?

Protection from cat scratches, bites, and contact of open wounds with cat saliva is the best way to avoid this illness. If a bite or scratch occurs, rapid and thorough cleansing of the wound with a soap or disinfectant may be preventative.

Cat owners are encouraged to keep their pets indoors and practice good flea control. Trimming nails or declawing may also help to decrease the risk of scratches and subsequent exposure to *Bartonella henselae*.

## Can I test my cat to see if it is a carrier?

The bacteria can be grown in blood culture and there is a specific blood serum test; however, these are used primarily in research and are not practical or economical for general use. Antibiotic treatment of carrier cats does not insure elimination of the bacteria from their system, but may be recommended in some cases.

## If someone develops Cat Scratch Disease after coming into contact with my cat, do I need to get rid of my cat?

This is generally not necessary or recommended unless a severely immunocompromised person is in frequent contact with the cat. Nail trimming and good flea control should be implemented.

