

Cat Scratch Disease



Cat Scratch Disease (Cat Scratch Fever) is a zoonotic (transmittable to people) disease of cats. Cats that carry the bacteria often do not show any signs or illness. People can contract the disease from cat bites and scratches, but a bite or scratch is not necessary. The cause of Cat Scratch Disease is the bacteria *Bartonella henselae* and any exposure can cause disease. The bacteria are carried in the stomach of fleas and contact of flea feces with an open wound is the main mode of transmission. Healthy cats can become re-infected by infected fleas throughout their life.

SIGNS

Cat Scratch Disease is generally mild in people. The signs are usually fever, chills, and lethargy, which only last a few days; it is often confused with the flu. The more severe forms of the disease will produce a very high fever, marked tiredness and anorexia, and often swollen and abscessed lymph nodes.

TRANSMISSION

Cats are involved in transmission of the bacteria. Cats can carry the bacteria for 2-3 years without showing any signs. The most important fact to remember is that **fleas are the carrier** and not cats themselves. Most infections occur from a scratch or a bite, but can also occur from any pre-existing open wound. The wound/bite/scratch is actually contaminated by flea feces and not from the cat.

PREVENTION

The most important thing to remember is that cats are not the culprit (**Fleas are**); thus, getting rid of cats not the answer. Also, declawing cats will not help since any wound can become infected. Euthanasia is most definitely the wrong answer because **Fleas** are the problem and there will still be flea feces in the environment. Any time a person in the household is infected; all cats should be treated with antibiotics for a month to rid each cat of the bacteria.

All wounds need proper cleaning and attention if cats are involved or even just present. All cats should be bathed to get rid of any flea feces. After that, the cats should be put on lifelong flea prevention such as *Revolution* to prevent further infestation. The most important thing to remember is that Cat Scratch Disease is not a disease of the cats but a disease of the fleas.