



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

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Cat-Scratch Disease

(Cat Scratch Fever)

What is cat scratch disease?

Cat scratch disease is a mild to severe bacterial disease often caused by *Bartonella henselae* that is spread by cat bites and scratches. Wild and domestic cats are the only animals thought to be infected with *Bartonella henselae*. Cats infected with bartonella can be carriers of the bacteria and rarely show signs of illness. Approximately 40% of cats may have *Bartonella* during their lifetime.

How do you get it?

You can get cat scratch disease by being bitten or scratched by an infected cat, especially kittens. Cat scratch disease is not transmitted between people.

What are the symptoms of cat scratch disease?

At first, a cat bite or scratch will be red and sore. The wound later changes to a blister or ulcer like sore that breaks open. The sore then dries out and heals in 1 to 3 weeks. Within two weeks, the lymph nodes closest to the wound site may become swollen. Fever and other symptoms may occur including fatigue, loss of appetite, weakness, chills, aches and rash. Cat scratch disease may be more severe in people with weakened immune systems. Complications can include blood, eye, nervous system, heart or liver infection.

When do symptoms start?

Symptoms of illness usually begin 3-14 days after being bitten, licked or scratched by an infected cat.

What is the treatment for cat scratch disease?

Antibiotics or other medications may be prescribed by physicians to treat cat scratch disease. Let your physician know if you have had contact with cats before becoming ill. The illness may resolve without treatment in 4 to 8 weeks.

How can you keep from getting it?

Limit activities such as rough play with cats and kittens that may lead to bites and scratches.

If you have been bitten or scratched by a cat wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water. For more severe wounds, consult your doctor.

Limit pet cat's exposure to the organism by keeping pets indoors and controlling fleas which may be a source of Bartonella infection in cats.

For more information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/diseases/catscratch.htm>

Iowa State University Center for Food Security and Public Health:

http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/FastFacts/pdfs/catscratch_F.pdf