



Hawaii State Department of Health
Disease Investigation Branch
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Cat-Scratch Disease

What is cat-scratch disease?

Cat-scratch disease is an uncommon illness that can be transmitted to people by pet cats. The agent that causes cat-scratch disease is a rickettsial (bacteria-like) organism called *Bartonella henselae*. Infected cats can transmit the illness to people even if the cats themselves do not appear to suffer any adverse effects from being infected.

How do you get it?

You can get cat-scratch disease when infected cats (usually kittens) bite or scratch the handler. You can also get it when an infected cat licks an open scrape or wound.

What are the symptoms of cat-scratch disease?

At first, the scratch or bite will be red and sore, but without pus. The wound later changes to a blister-like sore that breaks open. The sore then dries out and heals in 1 to 3 weeks. Within 2 weeks of being scratched, the lymph nodes closest to the site of the scratch may become swollen. Fever is usually present. Other symptoms include fatigue, loss of appetite, weakness, chills, aches, and a general feeling of being ill.

When do symptoms start?

The symptoms usually begin 3 to 14 days after being scratched or bitten by an infected cat.

What is the treatment for cat-scratch disease?

The illness in people is not usually serious. Most cases get well on their own without medications in 2 to 3 months. However, in more severe or recurring infections, a doctor can prescribe medicines to treat the disease.

How can you keep from getting it?

- Reduce contact with kittens and activities that may result in scratches or bites.
- Promptly cleanse any minor cat scratches or bites. For more severe wounds, consult your doctor.
- Take measures to limit a pet cat's exposure to the organism, such as by keeping cats indoors.

For more information, see the CDC's website at:

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