



BARTONELLA (Veterinary) FACT SHEET

What is bartonella?

Bartonella, also known as cat scratch disease or cat scratch fever, is a bacterial disease caused by *Bartonella henselae* (*B. henselae*). It can infect both humans and cats through a bite, scratch or saliva from an infected cat. About 14-70% of cats carry this disease at some point in their lives. Most people develop a mild infection at the site of injury, but some may experience serious complications. The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) reports that the disease occurs worldwide and most cases in the U.S. occur in the fall and winter months.

What are the signs in animals?

Cats are thought to be the only reservoir hosts for *B. henselae*. Most cats appear to be asymptomatic. When signs are present, they typically appear 2 to 16 days after exposure. Signs include a skin inflammation or pustules at the site of infection, fever, lethargy, loss of appetite, muscle pain and enlarged lymph nodes. *B. henselae* has not been isolated from dogs. Rodents and non-human primates appear to be asymptomatic.

How does the disease affect people?

People usually experience symptoms 3 to 20 days after exposure. In most people, cat scratch disease causes a mild to severe, self-limiting infection. A skin rash is seen in 25-90% of patients and consists of small pustules or ulcers at the site of the bite or scratch. One to four weeks later, lymph nodes can become enlarged and the skin lesions disappear. Enlarged lymph nodes typically last for a few weeks to a few months, but in some patients the lymph nodes can remain enlarged for up to 2 years. Other symptoms include fever, fatigue and malaise. Less often, headache, loss of appetite, vomiting, nausea, weight loss, enlarged spleen, pain and sore throat may occur. Complications of cat scratch disease occur in 5-16% of patients. These complications include brain inflammation, heart inflammation, nerve involvement and Parinaud's oculoglandular syndrome. Parinaud's syndrome is characterized by conjunctivitis and enlarged lymph nodes around the ear. In immunocompromised people, bacillary angiomatosis and peliosis hepatitis can occur. Bacillary angiomatosis causes vascular lesions of the skin and internal organs. Peliosis hepatitis is a rare condition that causes multiple blood-filled cysts in the liver.

How is bartonella transmitted?

B. henselae is most commonly transmitted from cat bites and scratches. Kittens are more likely to be infected than adults and can pass the bacterium to people. Cats that are infected with *B. henselae* typically do not show signs of illness. People who are immunocompromised are more likely to have complications from infection. *B. henselae* has been found in fleas; however, there is no evidence that a bite from an infected flea will cause infection to humans. The disease is not transmitted congenitally or from casual contact.

How can this disease be prevented?

There are several steps you can take to reduce your chances of becoming infected:

- Avoid bites or scratches from cats, especially kittens
- Avoid rough play with cats and kittens
- All bites and scratches should be washed immediately with soap and water
- Do not allow the cat to lick open wounds
- Wash hands thoroughly after contacts with cats and kittens
- Maintain proper flea control for cats, as this may decrease the risk of transmission between cats. Keeping cats indoors may also be beneficial.

Where can I get more information on cat scratch disease?

www.cdc.gov

www.dshs.state.tx.us

Source of information: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Rev. June 2016