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What is Cat Scratch Disease?

Cat Scratch Disease is a bacterial infection caused by a bacteria called *Bartonella henselae*. Cats become infected with *Bartonella* most commonly through flea bites but can also become infected through fights with infected cats. While some cats become ill, many carry the bacteria in their blood without getting sick.

Who gets Cat Scratch Disease?

People can get Cat Scratch Disease (CSD) from cat scratches, particularly scratches from kittens. The disease occurs most frequently in children under the age of 15. Cats can harbor infected fleas that carry *Bartonella* bacteria and these bacteria can be transmitted from a cat to a person during a scratch.

How is Cat Scratch Disease spread?

Most infections usually occur after scratches from domestic or feral cats, especially kittens. CSD occurs worldwide and may be present wherever cats and fleas are found. Stray cats may be more likely than owned cats to carry *Bartonella*.

What are the symptoms of Cat Scratch Disease?

Common symptoms of CSD include: a low-grade fever, enlarged, tender lymph nodes, and a swollen area on the skin or pimple at the inoculation site.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

The most common symptoms typically develop 1-3 weeks after exposure to CSD.

How is Cat Scratch Disease diagnosed?

A healthcare provider may make the diagnosis of CSD in a patient with typical signs and symptoms and an exposure history that makes CSD likely. Sometimes blood tests or testing of other samples for the bacteria that caused CSD may be performed.

What is the treatment for Cat Scratch Disease?

In most cases, the infection will clear on its own, however, sometimes antibiotics are recommended. Those with weakened immune systems, such as patients with HIV/AIDS, are receiving chemotherapy, or have diabetes may have complications from the infection that require additional treatments.

How can Cat Scratch Disease be prevented?

Avoid rough play with cats, particularly strays and kittens, to prevent scratches. Wash hands promptly after handling cats. Treat cats for fleas as recommended by a veterinarian. Permethrin should not be used on cats. Keep cats indoors and away from stray cats. Immunocompromised individuals should avoid owning cats less than one year of age.

How can I learn more about Cat Scratch Disease?

- If you have concerns about Cat Scratch Disease, contact your healthcare provider.
- Call your local health department. You can find your local health department at vdh.virginia.gov/health-department-locator/.
- For more information visit the CDC's page on *Bartonella* at cdc.gov/bartonella/about/index.html.

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