

Cat Scratch Disease

What is cat scratch disease?

Cat scratch disease is a disease caused by bacteria that are often carried by cats, especially kittens. About a week after being scratched or bitten, your child may have these symptoms:

- 1 or more bumps at the site of a cat scratch or bite
- tiredness
- poor appetite
- headache
- fever.

One to 4 weeks later, the bacteria travel to nearby lymph nodes, usually in the armpit, groin or neck. The lymph nodes become large lumps that are usually painful and may get red. Large lymph nodes are the most typical feature of cat scratch disease.

What causes cat scratch disease?

- The name of the bacterium that causes cat scratch disease is *Bartonella henselae*. Cats get the disease from fleas. The *Bartonella* bacteria does not cause the animal to act sick.
- The bacteria are transmitted to humans through a cat scratch, bite, or lick. Sometimes there is no obvious cause of infection (for example, your child has no scratches and wasn't ever near a cat). Rarely, the disease is spread by a dog or other animal.

How is it diagnosed?

Many children have typical symptoms and will not need other tests. However, there are other diseases that are similar to cat scratch disease. Some children need to be tested for other diseases before the health care provider can diagnosis cat scratch disease. To make a diagnosis, your health care provider may recommend blood tests, tuberculosis tests, X-rays, or testing a sample of fluid taken from the lumps.

How is it treated?

- Usually no treatment is needed and your child will get better without medicine. Headache and fever can be treated with acetaminophen or ibuprofen. Antibiotics may be given if severe symptoms develop or if your child has an immune deficiency.
- Your child cannot give the disease to anyone else. After having cat scratch disease once, your child is very unlikely to ever get it again.

How long will it last?

- Your child will be tired and have a loss of appetite usually for less than 1 week. The swollen lymph glands will usually start to get smaller in 2 months, but may not return to normal size for several months.
- About 1 in 50 people with cat scratch disease will have symptoms that affect the nervous system. Symptoms may include seizures, numbness and tingling, loss of muscle strength or problems with the eyes. These symptoms get completely better with time. Rarely a lymph node will form a tract to the skin and drain pus. Gradually the large lumps will decrease in size. On other rare occasions, the bacteria can spread to other parts of the body.

When should I call my child's health care provider?

Call during office hours if:

- your child is having high fevers
- your child is a lot of pain in a lymph node
- your child is acting very sick or having new signs or symptoms that concern you.

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