

## Cat Scratch Disease Fact Sheet

1. **What is Cat Scratch Disease?** - Cat Scratch Disease (CSD) is caused by a bacterium, *Bartonella henselae* that is transmitted by the lick, bite, or scratch of an infected domestic or feral cat. Fleas from an infected cat may pass the bacteria to other cats; however, it is not known if a flea can infect a human. About 40% of cats carry *B. henselae* at some time in their lives, and do not show any signs of illness; therefore, you cannot tell which cats can spread the disease to you. Kittens are more likely than adult cats to be able to pass infection on to humans.
2. **How common is CSD?** The estimated number of cases ranges from 2.5 to 9.3 per 100,000 people each year, worldwide. No surveillance data exists concerning the number cases that occur annually in Pennsylvania.
  - a. Children and young adults are more likely to be infected by *B. henselae*.
  - b. People with weakened immune systems are more likely to experience complications from infection than healthy people.
3. **Is my cat infected with *B. henselae*?** - Many cats have been exposed to the bacteria at some point in their lifetime. Although cats may be infected with the bacteria, they rarely show any symptoms of CSD, and are not at risk of becoming ill.
4. **What are the signs and symptoms?** - Symptoms in humans usually occur 3 to 30 days after infection. At the site of the scratch, a red bump, or a papule, may develop. Development of lymphadenopathy (swollen lymph nodes), occurs generally one to four weeks after infection, and can persist up to 12 months. Other symptoms include fever, long-lasting joint or bone pain, poor appetite, fatigue, and headache.
5. **How serious is CSD?** - CSD usually resolves on its own without any medical treatment. Complications may occur in persons with weakened immune systems; however, these complications are rare in healthy individuals. Complications include optic neuritis (inflammation of the retina and optic nerve), Perinaud's oculoglandular syndrome (a sore on the inner membrane lining eyelid), osteomyelitis (bone infection by bacteria), encephalitis, or encephalopathy (inflammation in the brain).
6. **What should I do if I think I have CSD?** – Contact your health care provider.
7. **Is CSD transmitted person to person?** – No.
8. **How is CSD diagnosed?** - Generally, three of the four criteria are needed to confirm CSD:
  - a. History of contact with a cat;

- b. Development of lymphadenopathy approximately two weeks after scratch/infection and exclusion of all other possible causes;
  - c. A positive CSD skin test; and
  - d. Positive findings on lymph node biopsy specimens.
9. **How is CSD treated?** - CSD in persons with a weakened immune system requires prolonged treatment (1 to 3 months) with antibiotics. Persons with a normal immune system generally recover without the use of antibiotics.
10. **How is CSD prevented?**
- a. Avoid ‘rough play’ likely to result in cat scratches.
  - b. Discourage children from playing with stray cats.
  - c. Immunocompromised people should avoid owning and/or handling kittens (cats less than one year old).
  - d. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm water after handling cats.
  - e. Scratches should be immediately washed with soap and warm water. Flea infestation should be controlled.
11. **For more information:** <http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/diseases/catscratch.htm>

This fact sheet provides general information. Please contact your physician and/or veterinarian for specific clinical information related to you or your animal.