

# CAT SCRATCH DISEASE

Cat Scratch Disease is also called “Cat Scratch Fever.” It is a disease affecting humans, not cats. The cause is a bacteria-like organism called *Bartonella henselae*. Most cases are diagnosed in the colder months—fall and winter. The reasoning for this is unknown.

Surveys have shown that about 5% of the U.S. population have antibodies in the blood against this disease, but have no history of clinical illness.

This human disease is usually very mild. Common signs are very mild and mimic influenza, including fever, chills, and lethargy that lasts only for a few days.

The more severe form of the disease causes a high fever, anorexia, weakness, and swollen lymph nodes, especially in the arm pits and groin. In rare cases, the affected lymph nodes may spontaneously rupture or require surgical drainage to establish drainage and relieve the pain.

The disease runs its course in a period of several days to several weeks. It is treated quite successfully with antibiotics since the specific causative agent has been identified.

Most cases seem to follow a cat scratch wound on the person. The following facts are the only knowledge currently available:

1. Adult cats are rarely involved. It is almost always a scratch from a kitten.
2. The cat appears to be contagious for only a short period of time, 2-3 weeks.
3. The bacteria-like organism lives in the cat’s mouth and is spread to the claws by the normal cat grooming (licking) process. Bite wounds do not appear to spread the disease. Therefore declawing the kitten at an early age is helpful to prevent potential infections.
4. The cat can be tested for the organism with a blood test. Positive cats can be treated with antibiotics. However, reinfection can occur.

***Banning cats from the household is not warranted!!*** It has been shown that less than 10% of family members scratched by the same cat develop the disease. There also is no record of a person having the disease more than once even though the cat is kept in the household.