

While house cats are generally friendly and make excellent pets, almost all animals have the potential to bite. Some cats may be more aggressive or fearful than others, and therefore more likely to bite. Even the most well-natured cat may bite if it is very frightened or in pain. Over-exuberant play may also result in a bite, particularly in kittens. While cat bites usually cause less physical trauma than dog bites, the potential for serious infection is likely greater with cat bites.

Not-So-Nice Pussy Cat Problems

- It is estimated that 20-50% of cat bite wounds become infected. Usually several different kinds of bacteria are present in a bite wound, some of which can cause very severe infection at the site of the wound, or even enter the bloodstream and spread to other parts of the body.
- Cat bites can result in deep puncture wounds which may carry bacteria to deeper tissues such as bones and joints. Infection of these tissues can be much more difficult to treat than a superficial flesh wound.



What Do I Do If A Cat Bites Me?



- Immediately **wash the wound** thoroughly with lots of soap and water.
- All animal bites, even from your own pet, should be **reported to your local public health unit**.
 - Note if the cat that bit you appears healthy or sick. Be sure to tell the public health official when you report the bite:
 - If the cat is behaving strangely, especially if it is a stray cat or one you don't know, as it could potentially have rabies.
 - If you know the cat, and can confirm its rabies vaccination status is up-to-date.

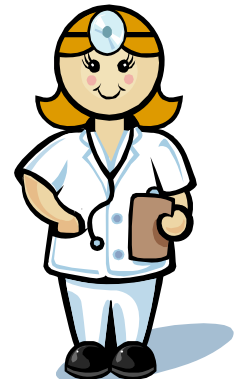


- Try to **determine why the cat bit you**, so you can try to avoid the same thing happening again.
 - Did you do something that may have frightened the cat?
 - Were you holding the cat in a way that was uncomfortable or possibly painful for the cat?
 - Did the cat bite when you touched it in a certain place that may be painful?
 - Sometimes cats may have hot spots or abscesses that are hidden by their fur.
 - Is the cat aggressive? If so, what is it particularly aggressive about?
 - Some cats may be aggressive about food, toys, a particular sleeping area, or even being petted for too long.

Do I Need To See A Doctor For A Cat Bite?

You should see a doctor as soon as possible for any bite that:

- is on a hand
- is over a joint
- is over a tendon sheath, such as bite on the wrist or the ankle
- causes a lot of tissue damage (e.g. a deep tear or tissue "flap")
- is over a prosthetic device or an implant
- is in the genital area



You should also consult a doctor for any cat bite if you have any of the following conditions, as you may be at higher risk for developing complications:

- Compromised immune system (e.g. HIV/AIDS, transplant or chemotherapy patients)
- Chronic swelling (edema) in the area that was bitten
- If you have had your spleen removed
- Liver disease, diabetes, lupus or similar chronic diseases

- If the bitten area becomes increasingly **painful or swollen**, if there is **pus** or any **discharge** (particularly with a **bad smell**) coming from the wound, or if you develop a **fever** or **swollen lymph nodes** (glands), you should also see your doctor as soon as possible.
- Your doctor will decide (in some cases in consultation with public health and veterinary personnel) if you need antibiotics, tetanus or rabies vaccination or any additional treatment for the wound. Most bite wounds are not stitched closed because this can trap infection in the wound.



Prevention Prevention Prevention!!!

The most important and easiest way to prevent infection from a cat bite is to prevent the bite! While it may not be possible to prevent 100% of bites, the following points can help reduce the risk considerably:

- ✔ **Know how to handle your cat properly.** Many bites occur because a person does something that the cat doesn't like, such as handling it roughly or incorrectly. If you're not sure what the best way is to handle a cat, ask your veterinarian for some advice. Make sure anyone who handles your cat knows how to do so as safely as possible.
- ✔ **Never let a cat play with your hands, feet or hair.** Always use an appropriate cat toy instead. If the cat gets too excited, gentle nips can suddenly turn into bites hard enough to break your skin.
- ✔ Always **supervise young children** when they are around a cat.
 - Teach children to be gentle and quiet so the cat is not frightened.
 - Also teach children never to approach a cat (or any other animal) they don't know.
- ✔ Some cats have **petting aggression**, which means they can get very excited during petting and may suddenly lash out with their claws or teeth. Most cats will give some form of warning, such as an excited or anxious look, a change in body posture or a noise of some kind, but it may be very brief. If the cat shows any of these signs, stop petting it immediately until the cat calms back down.
- ✔ Have your cat examined regularly by your veterinarian. This will help to identify problems earlier that could increase the risk of biting, such as painful physical problems and behavioural problems.



Zoonotic Diseases From Cat Bites

The following are the more important diseases that people can potentially contract from cat bites. Please refer to individual disease information sheets for additional details.

Cat scratch disease:

- ▶ An infection caused by a bacterium, *Bartonella henselae*, which infects up to 40% of cats, but does not make cats sick. It can be transmitted by cat bites as well as scratches. Infection often causes fever and very swollen lymph nodes which resolve without treatment, but it can be more serious or even fatal in immunocompromised individuals.

Other infections associated with cat bites:

- ▶ The large number of different bacteria in a cat's mouth and the tendency for cat bites to be deep puncture wounds creates an ideal situation for infections of various types to develop. This is probably the most common complication of cat bites.

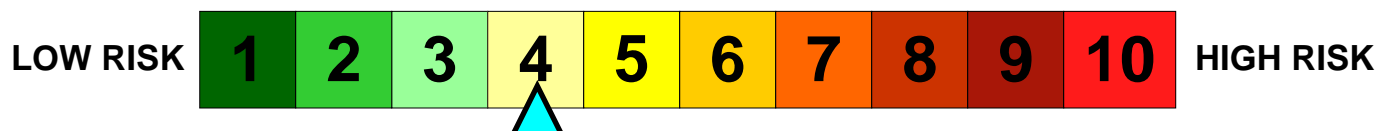
Rabies:

- ▶ This is a viral infection of the nervous system that is almost always fatal once clinical signs appear. Cats are usually infected by direct contact with a rabid animal, most often a skunk, fox, raccoon or bat. Transmission occurs when the saliva of an infected animal comes in contact with a wound (such as a bite or scratch) or mucous membrane (eyes, nose, mouth). Rabies is a reportable disease in humans and animals in Canada.
- ▶ All cats should be vaccinated against rabies. Even cats that never go outside can potentially be exposed to rabies if, for example, a bat gets into the house. The consequences of exposure in an unvaccinated pet are very serious.

Zoonotic Disease Risk

The zoonotic disease risk to a member of the general population that is bitten by a domestic cat depends on several factors, particularly where on the body the person is bitten. In general, the risk is likely:

HEALTHY ADULTS / OLDER CHILDREN



Groups at higher risk of developing serious infection and complications from a cat bite include immunocompromised individuals (e.g. HIV/AIDS, transplant and cancer patients), infants and young children less than five years of age, and the elderly. For members of these groups, the zoonotic disease risk from being bitten by a domestic cat is likely:

YOUNG CHILDREN / IMMUNOCOMPROMISED PERSONS

