



Halifax Veterinary Center

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Bartonellosis (Cat-Scratch Disease)

- Bartonellosis (also known as *Bartonella* infection) is a bacterial disease that can infect many different species, including cats and humans. People with weakened immune systems are at an increased risk of infection.
- *Bartonella* infection may cause chronic inflammatory conditions in cats, such as stomatitis (inflammation of the mouth), gingivitis (inflammation of the gums), and inflammatory bowel disease. Some cats may carry the disease but appear to be completely healthy.
- Bartonellosis is primarily transmitted to cats by fleas. It can be transmitted to humans from cats through a scratch or bite. The disease is rarely transmitted to humans by fleas.
- Treatment of Bartonellosis includes administration of antibiotics and other medications, as necessary, to manage inflammation and pain.
- Regular application of flea and tick preventatives, as recommended by your veterinarian, is important for helping prevent the spread of Bartonellosis.

What is Bartonellosis?

Bartonellosis is a disease caused by several bacteria of the *Bartonella* family. *Bartonella* organisms can cause bacterial infections in many species, including humans. Certain strains of *Bartonella* are known to infect cats. *Bartonella* organisms can be transmitted from a cat to a human via a bite or scratch, so Bartonellosis in humans is commonly called *cat-scratch disease*.

Cats can become infected with *Bartonella* through exposure to infected fleas. For this reason, cats roam outdoors are at greater risk for exposure. There is some evidence that ticks may also transmit the disease.

Some reports state that 12% to 50% or more of cats have been infected with *Bartonella*. The risk of exposure varies greatly depending on the region of the United States. Areas with warmer climates have a higher incidence of fleas and, therefore, a higher percentage of cats infected with *Bartonella*.

Signs of Bartonellosis

Many cats that have been exposed to *Bartonella* do not get sick and, therefore, do not show clinical signs of disease. However, these cats may still transmit the disease to humans. Clinically affected (sick) cats may have various clinical signs, including chronic inflammatory conditions that affect the eyes, mouth, respiratory tract, gastrointestinal system, and even the heart. More specific clinical signs may include:

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- Uveitis (inflammation of a part of the eye)
- Stomatitis (inflammation of the mouth)
- Gingivitis (inflammation of the gums)
- Chronic upper respiratory disease (sneezing, nasal and eye discharge)
- Inflammatory bowel disease (chronic vomiting and/or diarrhea and/or weight loss)
- Fever

Infected cats may show one or more of the signs listed above. It is very important to discuss these illnesses with your veterinarian because other diseases may also cause these signs.

Symptoms of Bartonellosis in humans generally occur about 3 weeks after a cat scratch or bite and include fever and swollen lymph nodes along with a number of other possible symptoms. Consult with your physician regarding any concerns or questions about Bartonella infection.

Diagnosis and Treatment

We can perform a blood test on your cat to check for *Bartonella* infection. The test indicates the presence of antibodies, which the body uses to fight specific infections. A positive test result means that your cat has been exposed to *Bartonella*. If your cat is showing signs of disease and has a positive test result, we may recommend antibiotics to treat the disease. There is controversy about whether to treat cats that test positive for *Bartonella* but are not showing signs of illness. We can discuss options with you if there is cause for concern over a *Bartonella* positive cat in your household.

Prevention

Regular application of flea and tick preventatives will help to prevent *Bartonella* infection.

To reduce risk of human infection from cats, keep your cat's nails trimmed and do not tease or entice play that may result in a bite or scratch from your cat. If you have difficulty trimming your cat's nails, we can do that for you, or teach you how to do it yourself...