

THE BACTERIA THAT INFECT 40 PERCENT OF CATS

Cat bites can be more dangerous than dog bites, according to animal behaviorist Katherine A. Houpt, VMD, Ph.D., at Cornell because they create puncture wounds. "The wound heals over and bacteria are trapped inside," she says.

Best known is the condition caused by *Bartonella henselae* bacteria, one more strongly associated with transmission by feline claws: cat scratch disease, also called cat scratch fever. Some 40 percent of cats are carriers, according to the Centers for Disease Control, but few show signs of the illness. Humans, on the other hand, can develop skin lesions, fever, fatigue or, in severe cases, systemic infections.

The CDC recommends washing cat bites and scratches immediately and thoroughly with running water and soap. It also advises that those who see swelling or pus at the site of the scratch or bite, or who develop fever, headache, swollen lymph nodes or fatigue, contact a physician.

Dr. Houpt suggests that anyone who is old or immuno-compromised see a doctor immediately if they are bitten because of the danger of bacterial infection.