

Bartonella

A disease caused by a bacteria that is transmitted by an insect such as fleas, ticks, lice, biting and sand flies and keds.

Cats are of particular concern because they can be a carrier of the bacteria and spread it to people by a bite or scratch (e.g. cat scratch disease).

Although infection can occur in dogs, it is much less frequent than in cats and less likely to spread from dogs to people.

Risk Factors

The following are factors that have shown to increase the risk for cats to become infected:

- Stray or shelter cat
- Current or past history of fleas
- Spend time outdoors frequently
- Healthy cat living in multiple cat household with other Bartonella infected cats
- Live in a hot, humid environment

Clinical Signs

Signs can be variable and affect different body systems, but may include the following:

- Oral disease – gingivitis, mouth ulcers, enlarged lymph nodes
- Respiratory disease – discharge from the nose, sneezing, coughing, sinus infections
- Eye disease – inflammation of any part of the eye, drainage from the eyes
- Intestinal disease – inflammatory bowel disease, long term vomiting or diarrhea
- Skin disease – acne, infection or inflammation of the skin
- Heart disease
- Fever

Diagnosis

A blood test is performed through a specialized laboratory. The test measures antibody levels to *Bartonella* bacteria or a titer within your cat's blood to determine if there is a current infection.

Treatment

After considering your cat's clinical signs and blood test results, the veterinarian may find it necessary to treat the infection. It is extremely important to give the medication as directed so that the infection is effectively treated.

Titers should then be re-evaluated no earlier than 6 months after treatment to determine if your cat's infection has resolved.

Prevention

To decrease transmission between pets, it is best to administer flea/tick prevention every month.

Kittens are more likely than older cats to transmit the bacteria because of their playful nature and their interactions with people, especially children. Therefore, it is best to again treat kittens with flea and tick preventative.

Testing should occur in cat households where there are young children, a known past or present flea infestation, as well as cat households with people who are immunosuppressed by chemotherapy, organ transplant or HIV infection.