

Treating and Preventing Cat Bites

Act quickly after a cat bite to prevent the transmittal of bacteria and possibility of infection.

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Kansas State University's College of Veterinary Medicine offers tips on how to properly treat cat bites, including immediately washing the wound. When a cat or dog bites, an infection can follow.

Dr. Kate Stenske, a clinical assistant professor at Kansas State University's College of Veterinary Medicine, advises those who are bitten to first wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water, then call your doctor immediately.

"Wounds that are most likely to become infected are those on the face and hands or when people wait more than eight hours before seeking medical attention," Stenske says.

Infections occur when bacteria from a cat or dog's mouth transfer to the damaged tissue, or when bacteria that already exists on the victim's skin enter the damaged tissue. Some of the common bacteria transmitted are Pasteurella, Bacteroides, Fusobacterium and Streptococcus. According to Stenske, the rabies virus can be transmitted through bite wounds as well.

"Cats especially have very sharp little teeth, so they can inject bacteria deep into a person's skin without causing much of an external wound," Stenske says.

To minimize the risk of biting, Stenske says it helps to recognize subtle signs of fear, nervousness or aggression in a dog; it also helps to neuter your cat or dog, train and socialize them, and use a harness and leash when outside.