

Cat Bite Wounds and Abscesses

Cats are highly territorial and often fight when they meet outside or, less commonly, within the household. During fights, cats inflict deep bite wounds that inject bacteria from the mouth into the internal tissues. Cat bite wounds frequently become infected and abscessed. An abscess is a pocket of infection that the body has walled off.

Signs of Abscesses

If you know your cat has been in a fight, it's a good idea to examine him carefully for signs of injury. Bite wounds may leave only tiny puncture holes on the skin. Veterinary care is always recommended for cat bite wounds. More often, you won't know that your cat has been fighting until an abscess forms. Signs of an abscess include fever, lethargy, loss of appetite, pain and the appearance of a swollen area. Hair may be lost in the area, and the skin may rupture, leaking foul-smelling pus onto the fur. The most common areas for bite wounds and abscesses are the face, legs, and the base of the tail.

How Abscesses are Diagnosed

Your veterinarian can usually diagnose the abscess based on a physical exam. It may be necessary to shave hair from parts of the body to look for bite wounds.

Abscess Treatment

Cats typically require anesthesia for initial drainage and cleansing of the infected area. All of the pus and dead tissue will be removed. The wound is encouraged to heal without trapping bacteria under the skin again. This usually means that the wound is left open so that the internal tissues heal first, before the skin. Drains may be placed temporarily under the skin. In addition to giving oral medications, it may be necessary for you to administer topical antiseptics or antibiotics directly to the wound area. Hot packing the area with a warm, wet washcloth for 5-10 minutes twice daily is also beneficial. Most cats heal well with proper treatment.

Even though an untreated abscess usually ruptures and drains on its own, recurrence is extremely common without professional care. Cats with abscesses can also get sick enough to stop eating and become severely dehydrated. Prompt medical attention is a must for all cat bite wounds and abscesses.

Biting is the most common means by which some serious cat diseases are spread. Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV), Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV), and Rabies can all be spread by bites. If your cat goes outside he should be vaccinated against FeLV and Rabies. Your veterinarian may also advise testing for exposure to FeLV and FIV after a bite.

Preventing Abscesses

The main mechanism for preventing abscesses is keeping cats indoors, where they are less likely to fight. Routinely checking your cat for injuries is also a good idea.