

Rat Bite Fever Fact Sheet

What is rat bite fever?

Rat bite fever (RBF) is an infectious disease caused by bacteria that are normally found in the mouths and respiratory tracts of many pet and wild rodents, most commonly rats. In the United States, RBF is caused primarily by *Streptobacillus moniliformis* bacteria.

How common is rat bite fever?

Because RBF is not a reportable disease in California, it is unknown how many cases occur each year. However, RBF is believed to be rare.

How do people get rat bite fever?

The most common ways people get RBF include having close contact with a pet rodent (e.g., handling, kissing, nuzzling) or receiving a bite or scratch from a rodent.

Rat bite fever is not spread from one person to another.

What are the symptoms of rat bite fever?

Symptoms of RBF typically begin 3 – 10 days after exposure and include:

- fever
- muscle and joint pain
- nausea and vomiting
- headache
- sore throat
- rash on the hands and feet

RBF can progress to involve the heart, lungs, and other organs, leading to death in approximately 10 percent of untreated patients. Because RBF is potentially fatal, it should be considered in persons with fever, joint pain, and rash and a history of contact with rats.

How is rat bite fever diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider may request for your blood or fluid from the site of the infection to be tested for the bacteria that cause RBF.

How is rat bite fever treated?

Rat bite fever can be treated with antibiotics. Healthcare providers who suspect RBF in a person should start antibiotic treatment right away.

How do I prevent getting rat bite fever?

Most cases of RBF in the United States are acquired through contact with pet rodents (such as rats, mice, and gerbils). Persons with pet rodents should avoid kissing or nuzzling them, and should wash their hands immediately after contact with the rodent or its enclosure. Pet rodents should be kept confined and not allowed to roam in the house. Persons who are bitten or scratched by a rodent should wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water and seek medical attention if they develop any signs of illness in the subsequent two weeks.

Where can I get more information about rat bite fever?

The [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](http://www.cdc.gov/rat-bite-fever/) (<http://www.cdc.gov/rat-bite-fever/>)