

# Animal Bite

## Definition

- Bite or claw wound from a pet, farm or wild animal

## Health Information

### Types of Animal Bites

- **Bruising.** There is no break in the skin. No risk of infection.
- **Scrape (Abrasion) or Scratch.** A wound that doesn't go all the way through the skin. Low chance of infection. Antibiotic drugs are not needed.
- **Laceration (cut).** A wound that goes through the skin to the fat or muscle tissue. Some chance of infection. Most need to be seen. Cleaning the wound can help prevent this. Antibiotic drugs may be needed.
- **Puncture Wound.** Greater risk of infection. Puncture wounds from cat bites are more likely to get infected. Antibiotic drugs may be needed.

### Causes

- **Bites from Wild Animals.** Some wild animals can have rabies. Rabies is a disease that can kill people. Bites or scratches from any large wild animal can pass on rabies. Animals at highest risk for rabies are bats, skunks, raccoons, foxes, and coyotes. These animals may spread rabies even if they have no symptoms.
- **Bats.** In the U.S., 90% of cases of rabies in humans are caused by bats. Bats have spread rabies without a visible bite mark. Any contact with a bat requires a call to your child's doctor.
- **Small Wild Animal Bites.** Small animals such as mice, rats, moles, or gophers do not carry rabies. Chipmunks, prairie dogs, squirrels and rabbits also do not carry rabies. Sometimes, their bites can get infected.
- **Large Pet Animal Bites.** Most bites from pets are from dogs or cats. Dogs and cats are free of rabies in most cities. Stray animals are always at risk for rabies until proven otherwise. Cats and dogs that always stay indoors are free of rabies. The main risk in pet bites is wound infection, not rabies. Cat bites become infected more often than dog bites. Cat scratches can get infected just like a bite because cats lick their claws.
- **Small Indoor Pet Animal Bites.** Small indoor pets are at no risk for rabies. Examples of these pets are gerbils, hamsters, guinea pigs, or mice. Tiny puncture wounds from these small animals also don't need to be seen. They carry a very small risk for wound infections.

### Prevention of Bites from Pets

- Provide adult supervision around dogs and cats. Very important for young children.
- Teach your child to never approach a dog that is feeding.

## Care Advice

### 1. Overview:

- Bites that don't break the skin can't become infected.
- Cuts and punctures always are at risk for infection.
- Here is some care advice that should help.

2. **Cleansing:**
  - Wash all wounds right now with soap and water for 5 minutes.
  - Then, flush well under running water for a few minutes. Reason: Can prevent many wound infections.
3. **Bleeding:**
  - For any bleeding, put pressure on the wound.
  - Use a gauze pad or clean cloth.
  - Press for 10 minutes or until the bleeding has stopped.
4. **Antibiotic Ointment:**
  - For small cuts, use an antibiotic ointment such as Polysporin. No prescription is needed.
  - Put it on the cut 3 times a day.
  - Do this for 3 days.
5. **Pain Medicine:**
  - To help with the pain, give acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or ibuprofen. Use as needed.
6. **Cold Pack for Bruises:**
  - For bruising, use a cold pack. You can also use ice wrapped in a wet cloth. Apply it to the bruise once for 20 minutes. Reason: Helps with bleeding, pain and swelling.
7. **What to Expect:**
  - Most scratches, scrapes and other minor bites heal up fine in 5 to 7 days.

## Call Your Doctor If

- Bite starts to look infected (pus, redness, red streaks)
- Fever occurs
- You think your child needs to be seen
- Your child becomes worse

### Pediatric Care Advice

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