

Animal Bites and Scratches

The mouths and claws of all animals carry bacteria which can cause an infection in the flesh around the bite and eventually, if untreated, may spread into the bloodstream.

If bites or scratches penetrate deeply, tetanus may develop.

- > Rabies and Australian Bat Lyssavirus
- > Tetanus

Bat bites

Australian bats harbour a lyssavirus which is very similar to the fatal rabies virus. Only people who are immunised with rabies vaccine should approach or handle bats. If you are scratched or bitten by a bat, you should clean the wound immediately with soap and water and contact a doctor immediately for further assessment.

Fish and other marine organisms

Scratches from fish and other marine organisms such as coral can cause unusual infections. If an injury caused by fish or a wound contaminated by sea, pond or aquarium water becomes infected, it is important to see your doctor and explain how the injury occurred

Treatment

All animal scratches and bites should be washed quickly and thoroughly with soap and water. Deep puncture wounds, extensive superficial injuries and all injuries caused by bats should be assessed by a doctor as soon as possible.

Prevention

To reduce the chances of illness from animal bites or scratches:

- > Pets should always be adequately restrained.
- > Sick or injured animals should be treated promptly.
- > Children approaching domestic and wild animals should be supervised.
- > Animals should not be disturbed while they are eating.
- > People who have professional contact with bats should have a current immunisation against rabies. Other people should avoid close contact.