What is Cat Scratch Disease (CSD)?
Cat Scratch Disease (CSD) is caused by the bacteria *Bartonella henselae*. It is generally transmitted by the bite, scratch, or lick of an infected domestic cat. While the cat flea may be infected with the bacteria and pass bacteria between cats there is currently no evidence that an infected flea can transmit the bacteria to a human. Kittens are more likely to be infected and therefore are more likely than adult cats to pass CSD to humans.

How common is CSD?
The estimated number of CSD cases range from 1.8 to 9.3 per 100,000 people each year worldwide. Approximately 22,000 to 24,000 cases are thought to occur in the US each year. Children and young adults are more likely to be infected. Immunocompromised individuals are more likely than healthy people to experience complications from infection.

Is my cat infected with *B. henselae*?
Many cats have been exposed and may carry the bacteria at some point in their lifetime. Although a cat may be infected with the bacteria, they rarely show any signs of illness.

What are the symptoms of CSD in humans?
Symptoms usually occur 3 to 20 days after infection. At the site of the scratch, bite, or licking, a red bump, or a papule, may develop. Development of lymphadenopathy, or swollen lymph nodes, occurs generally one to four weeks later and can last weeks to months and has persisted up to two years. Other symptoms include fever, long-lasting joint or bone pain, malaise, anorexia, fatigue, and headache. If a cat scratch, bite, or area a cat has licked becomes infected or if symptoms develop you should contact your physician.

How is CSD diagnosed?
Generally CSD is diagnosed based upon history and physical examination. Criteria that may aid the diagnosis include:
- History of contact with a cat
- Identification of *B. henselae* bacteria by culture or other blood tests
- Development of lymphadenopathy approximately two weeks after scratch or infection and exclusion of all other possible causes
- Positive findings on lymph node, spleen, or liver biopsy specimens

How serious is CSD?
CSD usually resolves on its own without any medical treatment. Complications are rare among healthy individuals. However, complications may occur in immunocompromised individuals. Some possible complications include nerve involvement (i.e., inflammation may cause sensory losses), Perinaud’s oculoglandular (a form of CSD that affects the eye), endocarditis (inflammation in the heart), and encephalitis (inflammation in the brain).

How is CSD treated?
Regardless of treatment, CSD usually resolves on its own in healthy individuals. Complicated and systemic cases among immunocompromised individuals may benefit from antibiotic treatment.

How is CSD prevented?
Avoid rough play with cats and kittens that may result in scratches or bites. Do not allow cats to lick any open wounds that you may have. Discourage children from playing with stray cats. Cat bites and scratches should be immediately washed with soap and water. Flea infestation should be controlled to prevent infection in cats. Immunocompromised people should avoid owning kittens (i.e., cats less than one year old).

**Additional Information:**
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

*This fact sheet is meant to provide basic information. For specific health concerns please contact your physician or veterinarian. Updated 2009.*