

# Bite and Scratch Wounds and Injury Treatment Protocols

**A**lthough precautions can be taken to minimize the risk of animal bites and scratches, they are still one of the most common injuries in a veterinary practice. Oftentimes, the RVT or veterinarian who is bitten will downplay or shake off the injury, quickly clean it, and maybe bandage it. But there can be serious consequences if a wound isn't treated properly.

Infection is the major concern for animal bites and scratches. The ensuing infection causes pain, tissue damage, or potentially life-threatening problems. Infections occur more frequently from cat bites because a fang puncture from a cat's sharp, pointed teeth can cause deep wounds. The skin usually closes quickly, trapping bacteria. However, prompt and proper treatment often can prevent or minimize the risk of infection.

## When an Injury Occurs

Preventing bites and scratches is the best solution to avoiding wound complications. However, if you or someone in the practice is scratched or bitten, adhere to these medical treatment protocols:

- Employees should be instructed to notify management in the event of any workplace injury, no matter how minor it appears at the time. This policy should be posted and reinforced periodically to emphasize its importance.

- Call 911 for emergency or life-threatening situations.
- All bite wounds should be evaluated by a qualified medical professional as soon as possible to ensure all measures are taken to promote healing without complication.
  - Send the employee to a medical provider that is in the insurance carrier's medical provider network.
  - The wounded employee should be prepared to provide the examining physician with a detailed medical history to ensure any health conditions that would compromise immunity or lower resistance to infection are identified and accounted for in the treatment protocol. This history should also include a description of any self-treatment or first aid administered at the time of the bite/scratch.
- Immediately report the injury to your workers' compensation insurance provider.
  - Every employer is required to file a complete report for each employee of every occupational injury or illness that results in lost time beyond the date of the incident or which requires medical treatment beyond first aid. Lost time means absence from work for a full day or shift beyond the date of injury or illness.



- Provide the "Facts for Injured Workers" brochure, Workers' Compensation Claim Form (DWC-1), and the Medical Provider Network (MPN) Employee Notice.
- If the injured employee has a bite or scratch wound which begins to show signs of infection or swelling 3 to 10 days after the incident, send the employee for immediate follow-up with the treating physician.
- Encourage employees to always keep secondary medical appointments with the treating doctor to ensure the wound is properly evaluated and it is healing without complication. ■