

Teenager infected with rat-bite fever from her pet rodent

December 22 2015

A 17-year-old woman was infected with the rare, but treatable rat-bite fever, that developed from pet rodents that lived in her bedroom, report the doctors who treated her in the online journal *BMJ Case Reports*.

Rat-bite [fever](#) has been reported in writings dating as far back as 2300 years. It was originally described as a disease of the poor, but these days most cases occur in [lab workers](#) or in children with pet rodents.

The condition is often goes unrecognised and undiagnosed. Only 200 cases of rat-bite fever have been recorded in the USA since 1839.

Most cases of rat-bite fever involve a bite or scratch from a rodent, but there are several reports of infection without direct bacterial inoculation.

The [young woman](#) was admitted to hospital with pain in her right hip and lower back that had continued for two days and led to immobility. Over the proceeding two weeks, she had an intermittent fever, nausea and vomiting, and a pink rash on her hands and feet.

Her nausea and vomiting improved, but the fever continued, and she had tenderness of a joint in her pelvis, and pain in her right leg.

The doctors learnt that the [woman](#) had numerous pets including a dog, cat, horse and three pet rats. The rodents lived in her bedroom. One of these rats had died 3 weeks prior to onset of her symptoms.

A [blood test](#) returned positive for *Streptobacillus moniliformis*—the most common cause of ratbite fever.

The disease can have mortality as high as 13%, if left untreated. Fortunately, the woman underwent 4 weeks of antibiotics. After 5 days, her rash and fever disappeared, and the joint pain in her pelvis improved over the following weeks. She made a full recovery.

More information: Oh Rats! Fever, Rash, and Arthritis in a Young Woman, *BMJ Case Reports* ,
casereports.bmj.com/content/2015/bcr-2015-212240

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