



## Rat bite fever caused by rats and other rodent pets

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Many people have rodents as pets and they can make wonderful pets for people who do not have room for a larger pet or cannot have a dog, cat or bird. However, although it is rare, rat bite fever can be transmitted by pet rodents, either through a bite or scratch. Rats, gerbils, mice, guinea pigs and ferrets are capable of transmitting rat bite fever. Rat bite fever is an old disease that has been recorded for over 2300 years.

Rat bite fever is caused by **Streptobacillus moniliformis** is the most common cause of rat bite fever. The symptoms include fever, pain in joints, nausea, rash and vomiting and can be fatal if not treated.

Children, pet store workers, veterinary technicians, veterinarians and laboratory technicians are in the higher risk group since they handle rodents the most. Parents should monitor children who have rodents as pets and if they are bitten or scratched, notify your pediatrician. People who frequently handle rodents can wear protective gloves to prevent being bitten.

Socializing a pet rodent is a precautionary measure to reduce the chance of being bitten. Rodents can be trained using clicker training methods which will also help to reduce the chances of being bitten by teaching the rodent to come to you.

Always be careful not to frighten or startle a rodent. Avoid trying to handle a rodent that is sleeping. A tap on the cage or talking to the rodent before handling it can calm the rodent and allow the pet to be aware that it is going to be handled. Using common sense will help prevent being bitten and avoid rat bite fever.

Keep in mind that rat bite fever can also be transmitted by wild rodents. If there are wild rodents in your area and they are trapped, use caution in removing them or handling predators that might have caught and killed a rodent.