

Feline Bordetellosis

- Feline bordetellosis is a contagious respiratory infection caused by the bacterium *Bordetella bronchiseptica*.
- Signs of this disease include sneezing, nasal and eye discharge, difficulty breathing, fever, enlarged lymph nodes and, less often, coughing.
- The bacterium is transmitted to cats through contact with infected cats, and sometimes dogs, or by exposure to secretions from the nose, throat, or eyes of infected animals.
- People, especially those with compromised immune systems, may be at risk for contracting the infection.
- Diagnosis is made by observing clinical signs or by culturing the throat, nose, or lungs of infected animals.
- Cats with bordetellosis are treated with antibiotics, and in cases of severe infection, may need to be hospitalized.
- A vaccine is available but is generally only used in cats at high risk for this infection.

What Is Feline Bordetellosis?

Feline bordetellosis is a contagious respiratory infection caused by the bacterium *Bordetella bronchiseptica*. While this bacterium may be the primary cause of the disease, it can also be secondary (related) to various viral infections. Cats of all ages may contract this disease, although it typically occurs in younger cats.

What Are the Signs of Feline Bordetellosis?

Signs of feline bordetellosis can range from mild to severe. Infected cats may experience sneezing, nasal and eye discharge, loss of appetite, fever, and enlarged lymph nodes. If the bacterium invades the lungs, cats can show more severe signs, such as difficulty breathing and coughing. In some cases, infection may lead to death.

How Is the Infection Transmitted?

The infection is spread primarily through direct contact with an infected animal. Exposure to secretions from the nose, throat, or eyes of an infected animal may also result in infection. Dogs harboring *B. bronchiseptica* infection, also known as *kennel cough*, may transmit the infection to cats as well. It's also possible for people, especially those with compromised immune systems, to contract the infection from animals in the household.

How Is the Disease Diagnosed?

Respiratory infections may be diagnosed based on associated clinical signs. In some cases, the veterinarian may recommend that samples from the throat, nose, or lungs be submitted for culture (testing for bacteria) to determine the exact cause and most effective treatment.

How Is the Disease Treated?

In cats with mild respiratory signs, the infection may be self-limiting, meaning that it may resolve on its own. Other cats are typically treated with an oral antibiotic, such as a tetracycline. In some cases, cats may require hospitalization. All cats with respiratory infections should be isolated from other animals and susceptible people to prevent further transmission of the disease.

Can the Disease Be Prevented?

A vaccine to help prevent feline bordetellosis is available and may be given to kittens aged 1 month or older. However, it is generally only used for cats and kittens with prior exposure to shelters, boarding facilities, or breeding sites where the potential for infection is high or to prevent infection when the pet will be exposed to other cats at groomers, boarding facilities, or cat shows.