



Animal Bites and Scratches

Most bites and scratches from household pets are nothing to worry about. But some bites or scratches can be serious. Others may become infected or pose the risk of rabies. For that reason, it's best to seek medical treatment for all but the most minor bites

Report severe animal bites to animal control or your local health department.

When to go to the emergency room (ER)

A bite that barely breaks the skin usually isn't cause for concern. But seek emergency medical care if you:

- Have a deep puncture wound or badly torn skin
- Have redness, swelling, or warmth near the wound
- Think you may have a broken bone or other serious injury
- The attack was unprovoked and you don't know the animal (rabies must be ruled out)
- Are bitten by a domestic cat or a wild animal, such as a skunk, raccoon, or bat
- Do not have a spleen or have a suppressed immune system

What to expect in the ER

- The wound will be carefully cleaned and inspected.
- X-rays may be taken if deep damage is suspected.
- Although not common, infection can occur, especially if you have a cat bite, deep wound, or weakened immune system. You may be given antibiotics to help prevent this.
- You may be given a tetanus shot if you haven't had one in the past 5 years. If rabies is a concern, you may be given shots to protect you.
- If serious tissue or joint damage has been done, you may be referred to a plastic or orthopedic surgeon.

Follow-up

You will likely need to see your doctor within a day or two of receiving emergency medical treatment. In the meantime, watch for signs of infection. These include:

- Fever over 101°F (38.3°C)
- Swelling
- Redness
- Pus draining from the wound