



Can Tuberculosis Be Contracted from Family Pets?

Daniëlle Gunn-Moore, BSc, BVM&S, PhD, FHEA, MACVSc, MRCVS, RCVS

*The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies
University of Edinburgh*

All members of the tuberculosis (TB) complex pose potential zoonotic risks.¹ Until recently, there were few published reports of humans infected by cats. In a historic case, a 3-year-old boy died from generalized infection after being bitten on the arm by a cat in the advanced clinical stages of *Mycobacterium bovis* TB.² In another case, a man in Australia with a colony of 5 cats and 2 possums—all of which had clinically confirmed *M bovis* infection—became Mantoux-test positive, although he was never clinically ill.³

More recently, a cluster of 9 cats in Great Britain was reported to have *M bovis* infections.⁴ Anecdotally, the author is aware of a household of 3 dogs with *M bovis* infections and a young son with subclinical TB.

Although these cases are rare, the TB risk should not be understated, and humans exposed to *M bovis*-infected cats—especially those with open, exudative lesions—should be assessed by their physicians and local health authorities.

In General

- ▶ Potential sources of infection include domestic animals, wildlife (eg, rabbits, rodents), and soil.
- ▶ Cats can also develop TB from *Mycobacterium microti* infection (from voles, mice).
 - *M microti* is far less zoonotic than is *M bovis*, and no cat-to-human spread has been reported.
- ▶ *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* and *M bovis* can both be anthroponotic

(ie, reverse zoonotic), and there have been a small number of unpublished cases in which humans have infected cats with *M bovis*.

References

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TB = tuberculosis