

# Cochrane Corner

## Antibiotics may be helpful for human bites but possibly not for animal bites

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### The problem

Bites by mammals are a common problem and they account for up to 1% of all visits to hospital emergency rooms. Dog and cat bites are the most common and people are usually bitten by their own pets or by an animal known to them. School-age children make up almost a half of those bitten. Prevention of tetanus and wound infection are the priorities for staff in emergency rooms. The question of whether or not to use antibiotics to prevent infection usually arises.

### Clinical bottom line

Antibiotics seem to be effective in preventing infection after human bites to the hand. This was based on one study and there were no other body parts associated with human bites. Also none of the bites were serious in that patients were excluded if they had joint or tendon injury. The situation with animal bites is less clear. For human bites it would seem reasonable to give antibiotics in a preventive fashion and for animal bites assessment of the severity and negotiation with the patient may be warranted.

*Antibiotics for mammalian bites*

	Success	Evidence	Harms
Antibiotics for human bites to the hand	NNT 2	Cochrane review <sup>1</sup> However the one study was small (n=48) and patients excluded if the bite penetrated a joint capsule or injured a tendon.	The usual harms with antibiotics such as GI symptoms and resistance (not reported in this study)
Antibiotics for animal bites	Not significant but all the studies were small	Cochrane review <sup>1</sup>	

NNT = numbers needed to treat for one person to prevent an infection

### References

1. Medeiros I, Saconato H. Antibiotic prophylaxis for mammalian bites. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2001, Issue 2. Art. No.: CD001738. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD001738.

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## Generalism

*'Generalism is central to the work of family physicians, and family medicine is the medical discipline for which comprehensive continuing care is most clearly a defining characteristic. Family doctors are not only specialists in family medicine but also, of all physicians, are the most expert in generalism. But our colleagues in several other specialties, such as surgery, internal medicine, and pediatrics, also require generalist skills relevant to each of their disciplines, and our communities depend upon the availability of this type of consultant expertise.'*

Gotkin C. Generalism in medicine. *Can Fam Physician*. [http://www.cfpc.ca/cfp/\\_cgi/toprint.asp?fn=/cfp/2005/Jul/vol51-jul-vital-1.asp&ttl=/cfp/2...](http://www.cfpc.ca/cfp/_cgi/toprint.asp?fn=/cfp/2005/Jul/vol51-jul-vital-1.asp&ttl=/cfp/2...)