

# Rare fungal infection reported in two cats, vet tech

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A rare fungal infection has been diagnosed in two cats and a vet tech who treated one of the animals, a new report warns.

The three cases—discovered in Kansas in late 2022 and early 2023—were caused by a fungus called *Sporothrix schenckii*, researchers from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in the May issue of the journal *Emerging Infectious Diseases*.

"The good [news](#) is that this fungal infection is treatable and cats can be cured if a diagnosis is made early," Dr. Arturo Casadevall, chair of

molecular microbiology and immunology at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore, told NBC News.

However, "these infections take a long time to get better," he noted.

Sporotrichosis is rare in the United States and typically causes a [skin infection](#) that isn't contagious, according to the CDC.

But when cats are infected, they carry a very high fungal load, meaning they are more likely to spread the infection to other cats, dogs and people, said report author [Ian Hennessee](#), an epidemic intelligence service officer at the CDC.

"They get these awful wounds on their face, in their [nasal cavities](#) and on their paws, and those lesions are full of these fungi," Hennessee told *NBC News*.

Usually, these infections don't concern public health officials.

"The only reason this particular case came to the attention of the health department was because of the human involvement," Dr. Erin Petro, a state public health veterinarian at the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, told NBC News. "That piqued our interest."

The first case was in an indoor-outdoor cat who had a wound on her paw that didn't heal, even with antibiotics. She spread the infection to a veterinary technician through a scratch. Several months later, a second cat from the same home also fell ill, NBC News reported.

Neither the first cat nor the vet tech were diagnosed right away, delaying how quickly they were given antifungal medications. The vet tech was put on an antifungal for eight months, and her infection finally cleared. The first cat also got an antifungal, but she got sicker and her owners had

her euthanized. The second cat was treated much more quickly and recovered, NBC News reported.

While cats rarely spread *S. schenckii* infections, that's not the case in South America, where the *Sporothrix brasiliensis* species is much more contagious.

The CDC is monitoring the spread of that particular [fungal infection](#), also in [cats](#), but it hasn't yet been detected in this country.

The Kansas cases raised concerns that *S. brasiliensis* could be the culprit, but testing revealed it was the less contagious species.

"We are not sounding the alarm that *Sporothrix schenckii* is nearly as much of a concern as *Sporothrix brasiliensis*," Hennessee said.

"We know it's a possibility that we could one day see *Sporothrix brasiliensis* cases in the U.S.," he said. "We want to raise awareness without making folks too alarmed."

Most fungal infections, including sporotrichosis, aren't tracked by the CDC, NBC News reported.

"There is a big problem with fungal diseases, but they tend to run under the radar," Casadevall said.

"If you have an outdoor cat that has a lesion that has not healed, you should at least ask their veterinarian if it could be a fungus," Casadevall said. "You have to think about it."

**More information:** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention has more on [sporotrichosis](#).

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