

As deadly cat disease spreads nationally, MU veterinarian finds effective treatment

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Lone Star ticks, which are notorious carriers of many diseases including cytauxzoonosis, or "bobcat fever," have been spreading across the nation in recent years. As a result, cats across much of the country are now exposed to the deadly disease. University of Missouri veterinarian Leah Cohn, a small animal disease expert, and Adam Birkenheuer from North Carolina State University, have found an effective treatment for the dangerous disease.

"Previous treatment methods have only been able to save less than 25 percent of infected cats, but our method, which is now being used by veterinarians across the country, has been shown to save about 60 percent of infected cats," Cohn said. "While that number isn't as high as we'd like due to the deadly nature of the disease, our method is the first truly effective way to combat the disease."

Routinely carried by bobcats and [mountain lions](#), Cohn and Birkenheuer also found that bobcat fever can even infect tigers. All types of cats, but only cats, can catch bobcat fever. Cohn calls the disease the "[Ebola virus](#) for cats," saying that it is a very quick and painful death for cats that succumb from the infection. Bobcat fever is easily spread between cats through tick bites, but Cohn and Birkenheuer found that the disease is not readily passed down through birth like malaria and many other protozoan diseases.

"Bobcat fever affects healthy outdoor cats the most, because they are the most likely to get bitten by ticks," Cohn said. "The disease acts very

quickly and can kill a cat less than a week after it begins to show signs of being sick, so it is important to get treatment from a veterinarian as soon as the cat appears ill."

Cohn says the best way for [cat owners](#) to prevent their cats from catching bobcat fever is to keep them indoors as much as possible. Early symptoms of the disease include sluggishness and refusal to eat. [Pet owners](#) who also have dogs should use tick collars, because while dogs are not susceptible to the disease, they can bring infected ticks into contact with house cats. Cohn says tick preventatives for cats also can help, but owners should be sure to check with their veterinarians to make sure they use cat-specific products, as tick collars for dogs can be harmful to cats.

Cohn says her future research involves creating a vaccine to protect cats against bobcat fever. Her work has been published in the *Journal of Veterinary Internal Medicine*, the *Journal of Veterinary Pharmacology and Therapeutics*, and the *Journal of Veterinary Parasitology*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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