

Cat-carried bacterium can infect people

CHICAGO (Reuter) A bacterium carried by many cats can infect humans with mild to life-threatening ailments such as a rare fever suffered by troops during the world wars and a disease that weakens the heart, researchers said Tuesday.

People with suppressed immune systems — such as AIDS patients and the elderly — are particularly susceptible to infections from the bacterium, *Rochalimaea henselae*, according to researchers at the University of California at San Francisco.

For that reason, "It is probable that the reported incidence of *Rochalimaea*-associated human disease will increase substantially," wrote

Dr. Jane Koehler in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

The researchers noted that cats and other pets are often recommended as companions for elderly people and those with AIDS.

Americans own 57 million felines, or about one for every three households.

Blood samples taken from 61 cats in the San Francisco area found that 25, or 41 percent, carried the bacterium.

Treatment with antibiotics can cure humans infected with the bacterium transferred from the cats' mouths, claws or feces, the researchers wrote.

Antibiotics and flea con-

trol are useful in ridding infected cats of the bacterium, which usually does not harm the animals.

The various human ailments caused by the bacterium include trench fever, a now-rare chronic fever often spread by head lice among troops stuck in the trenches of Europe during both world wars, and endocarditis, a degenerative heart disease that affects valve function.

Others include bacillary angiomatosis, which causes lesions on the skin, bones and some organs, and cat-scratch fever, which has flulike symptoms and causes lymph nodes near the scratch to become swollen and sometimes blister.