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DETECTION OF *BARTONELLA HENSELAE* IN AN ASYMPTOMATIC CAT

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Bartonella spp. are vector-borne bacteria with zoonotic potential. *Bartonella henselae* is the main causal agent of cat-scratch disease (CSD) or “cat scratch fever”. Domestic and wild felines are known to be its major reservoirs. Studies indicate that the presence of *B. henselae* infection in Europe is much higher than clinically detected since it is not a reportable disease. Feral and young (<1 year old) cats are more susceptible to *B. henselae* infection than indoor and older cats. The disease may occur after scratches and bites from an infected cat, especially in children and immunocompromised individuals. Here we describe the diagnosis of an infected cat with *B. henselae* after a suspected *Bartonella* infection in a 7-year-old child from a rural area that had direct contact with a cat. The child had a fever and inguinal lymphadenopathy whereas the parents and the cat were asymptomatic. A blood sample from the suspected cat was cultured on a blood agar plate and bacterial DNA was extracted from colonies resembling *B. henselae*. The 16S ribosomal RNA gene was amplified, sequenced and the isolate was confirmed as *B. henselae*. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first detection of *B. henselae* infection in an asymptomatic cat in North Macedonia. This finding reveals that *B. henselae* circulates in our country and it may affect both feline and human health. Year-round flea prevention in cats is recommended to help prevent *Bartonella* infection spread between the cats, and from cats to humans. Cat-scratch disease should be recognized as a present zoonotic threat in our country which needs to be included in the differential diagnosis when symptoms include lymphadenopathy, particularly in immunocompromised and young patients who had previous contact with cats.

Key words: *Bartonella henselae*, vector-borne bacteria, cat-scratch disease, zoonosis, public health