

Electrical Shock: A Cause of Lung Damage in Cats

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Kittens, by nature, like to chew on objects. Unfortunately, many households have a number of electrical cords which may be readily accessible to chewing pets. If a kitten chews a cord that is connected to an electrical socket, the kitten may receive a severe electrical shock.

What are the symptoms?

If a kitten chews through the rubber coating of an electrical cord, it will receive a severe shock as its teeth come in contact with the inner wires. The cat will cry out when it becomes 'shocked.' Additionally, the mouth may have received a severe burn, especially the roof and tongue areas. Following the burn, the affected areas will become red and irritated. This may take several days as the burned tissue dies and is sloughed off. In more severe instances, the electrical current may travel into the cat's body and cause damage to the lungs as well.

The damaged lungs generally fill with fluid (edema) within several days following the electrical shock. Kittens with damaged lungs from an electrical shock will have a difficult time breathing and may die if left untreated.

What are the risks?

Electrical shocks are always unpleasant and potentially life threatening. Any kitten receiving a shock should be monitored closely for several days for signs of burning and/or lung damage.

What is the management?



Prevention is the best. If possible, do not leave cords exposed. Encase cords in plastic tubing (PVC pipe) when possible. There are 'pet proof' cords available which will protect the kitten from shock if she does chew the cord. Additionally, bitter substances such as Chew Stop and Bitter Apple can be sprayed on cords to discourage chewing. Unplug all accessible cords when the kitten is left unsupervised.

Summary

Kittens that have received a shock must be monitored closely. Various medications are available to veterinarians to help manage lung and burn damage if present. In all cases of suspected electrical shock, consult your veterinarian. Proper management will be determined by the extent or severity of the shock. Remember that children are also at risk of electrical shock from chewing electrical cords.