

Rabies Protection

(Information from American Humane Association)

What is Rabies?

Rabies is a virus-borne disease of mammals, especially carnivores, which is commonly transmitted through bite wounds. When the virus enters the body, it travels along the nerves to the spinal cord and up to the brain, affecting its ability to function and ultimately causing death. The virus, carried in the salivary glands, can be transmitted when a rabid animal bites another animal or human.



How Do You Get Rabies?

You don't have to get bitten to get rabies. The virus may also be acquired, although infrequently, through a mucous membrane, such as the lining of the nose and eyes, or when infected saliva comes in contact with a cut or open wound.



The main wild-animal carriers of rabies are raccoons, skunks, foxes and bats. The main domestic carriers are dogs and cats who have not been vaccinated for the disease.

Because vaccines protect dogs, cats and ferrets, rabies has become primarily a disease of wildlife in the US.

How Does Rabies Affect Animals?

When most of us think of rabies, we imagine a dog drooling and barking viciously. While these are some signs of rabies in dogs, different species can display different symptoms and still be just as dangerous.



"Furious" rabies, the most familiar form of the virus, is characterized by uncontrolled viciousness and excitability. Animals may roam and wander great distances, vocalize constantly, and attack without reason. Dogs especially may eat unusual objects, like wood, and avoid human contact. As the disease progresses, the animal may develop muscular incoordination, disorientation, and even seizures, they may even progress to a short paralysis stage and then succumb.



Some animals, however, never show any of these signs, and instead experience various stages of paralysis, which is often called "dumb" rabies. During dumb rabies, an animal's voice may change in tone, and they may salivate or froth excessively as a result of their inability to swallow. The paralysis makes it difficult for them to breathe, sometimes causing a choking sound. Unknowingly, a person may try to remove the suspected foreign object from the animal's throat and thus be exposed to the virus.

Wild animals, on the other hand, may show other symptoms, such as a lack of fear - almost friendliness - towards humans. Some display less obvious changes, such as nocturnal creatures, like bats, skunks, and foxes, being active during the day.



Because a variety of ailments can mimic the symptoms of rabies, the presence of the disease can only be truly confirmed by a laboratory test. However, the test can only be done on the brain tissue of the dead animal. So, if you observe an animal with any rabies-like symptoms, use precaution and protect yourself from exposure by moving slowly away from the animal.

How Does Rabies Affect People?

Rabies in humans is rare. However, possible exposures to the virus do frequently occur. Once exposed the incubation period varies from 10 days to one year, depending on the extensiveness and location of the bite. During this time, treatment must be given or the person will contract the fatal disease.

Standard treatment in the US consists of an injection of anti-rabies globulin followed by five injections of rabies vaccine. Today the treatment is often no more painful than a typical injection.

What To Do If You're Bitten

1. Immediately wash the wound with soap and water to remove the animal's saliva.
2. Contact your doctor or health department to find out if that species is a rabies carrier in your area.
3. See your doctor to have the wound cleaned and other necessary treatment given. (Bites that break the skin can cause bacterial infections and sometimes require a tetanus shot.)
4. Report the incident to your local animal control agency or humane society, so they can locate and observe the animal for the specified time.
5. Remember the description and location of the animal.
6. If possible, find out if the animal is up-to-date on their rabies vaccine.
7. Do not kill the animal. You may put yourself at more risk for exposure.

10 Things to Reduce Your Risk

1. Vaccinate your pet against rabies.
2. Don't keep wild animals as pets. Americans keep more than 1.5 million exotic animals as pets which cannot be vaccinated against rabies.
3. Do not handle wildlife - dead or alive. While the virus won't survive very long in dead animals, you should wear moisture proof gloves before picking them up.
4. Avoid animals displaying unnatural behavior. Wild animals who are unusually friendly or displaying other unnatural behavior may have the rabies virus.
5. Discourage contact between pets and wildlife. Don't let your pets roam or encourage them to interact with unfamiliar domestic or wild animals.

6. Feed your pets indoors. Leaving food outside often attracts stray dogs, cats, and wildlife to your yard.
7. Animal-proof your trash. Make sure your trash lids are locked, and don't leave bags of garbage outside the cans.
8. Prevent wild animals from getting into the house. Prune tree branches that overhang the roof. Keep screens on windows and cover small openings, such as chimneys, furnace ducts, and eaves.
9. Report all stray animals to animal control. Stray animals may not be vaccinated for rabies. They also run a high risk of exposure to wild animals that carry the disease.
10. Give your child some guidelines to follow. Do not frighten young children, but make sure they learn some basic rules about protecting themselves from strange or unfamiliar animals.

Rules to Teach Your Child

- Tell them to never approach or play with a strange dog, cat, or wild animal, even if the animals seem friendly.
- Before touching someone's pet, have them get permission from the owner.
- Don't let them touch dead animals. Ask them to tell you if they find one.
- Teach them to immediately tell you or another adult if they are bitten or scratched by an animal.
- If they are bitten or scratched by an animal, ask them to remember:
 - What type of animal he was - a dog, cat, raccoon, skunk.
 - If he had a collar and tag.
 - How big and what color he was.
 - Which way he went.