

Fact Sheet: Rabies

What is rabies?

Rabies is a viral disease that is usually transmitted from animal to animal, but can also infect humans as a result of an animal bite. Animal bites should always be reviewed carefully to determine if the animal may have rabies. Prompt treatment of the person can prevent the development of rabies, but if symptoms of rabies develop, it is always fatal.

What are the symptoms?

It may take several weeks (usually 2-8 weeks), months, or up to one year to get sick after exposure.

Early symptoms

- Fever, headaches, fatigue, general anxiety or worry.
- Pain, tingling or numbness at the site of the bite.

Later symptoms

- Trouble swallowing, paralysis, seizure, coma and eventual death (100% fatal).

How is it spread?

The rabies virus is found in the saliva of infected animals. The virus is spread through a bite or scratch from an infected animal or through contact with intact mucous membranes. Animals most affected are wild animals such as: skunks, raccoons, foxes, wolves, coyotes and bats. Domestic animals (usually unvaccinated cats, dogs and horses) can also spread the virus.

Not considered likely to carry Rabies virus:

Chipmunks	Gophers	Prairie dog	Squirrels
Gerbils	Moles	Rabbits	Voles
Hamsters	Mice	Rats	
Guinea pigs	Muskrats	Shrews	

How is it prevented?

Clean the bite or scratch wound immediately with soap and warm water; this is the most effective prevention against rabies. Call your health care provider and follow his/her advice. A series of four rabies shots, a single dose of immune globulin, a tetanus booster and/or treatment for infection may be needed. When calling, be sure to tell your health care provider the following:

- The kind of animal (wild or domestic). Wild animal bites are always of more concern than domestic pets.
- Was the skin broken from the bite? Was there bleeding from the wound?
- Rabies vaccine status of the biting animal.

Call your local animal control office to assist in capture, isolation and testing of the animal. **Do not attempt to capture the animal yourself.**

- If it is a domestic pet, the animal may be confined away from other animals and people for 10 days and examined by a veterinarian or animal control officer before being returned to the owners.
- Wild and unwanted stray animals will be humanely destroyed and brain tissue sent for immediate testing.
- There is no confinement period for wild animals.

If a wild animal has bitten a pet, call your veterinarian and follow his/her advice.

How is it controlled?

- Make sure your pets are vaccinated against rabies. This includes cats, dogs, horses and ferrets.
- Do not handle stray or wild animals; call local animal control experts to help.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self -diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information, call your health care provider or call Washtenaw County Public Health at 734-544-6700.

