



## General Information About Rabies

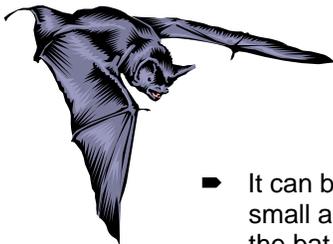
- Rabies is a virtually 100% fatal viral infection of the brain and spinal cord.
- The virus itself is a bullet-shaped, RNA virus that essentially cannot survive in the environment.
- Rabies virus can infect any mammal, but only carnivores and bats maintain the infection naturally. Livestock, rodents, rabbits and other non-biting animals can be infected but very rarely transmit the virus.
- It can take more than six months for a person or animal to develop signs of rabies after being infected, but once signs develop, the infection is practically always fatal.
- The best way to prevent and control rabies is to vaccinate cats, dogs and ferrets, and to prevent all contact of people and pets with wildlife that may be infected with the virus, such as racoons, skunks, bats and foxes.

## How Common Is Rabies?

- Rabies occurs worldwide, but there are some areas in Europe and some island nations that are rabies-free.
- About 50 000 people worldwide die from rabies each year, mostly in India and areas where rabies is still very common in dogs.
- In the USA, Canada and western Europe, rabies is found in certain species of local wildlife such as racoons, skunks, bats, foxes, and coyotes. In different areas, one or two or these species may be considered the main source of the virus. Infection in pets or people in these areas is usually a result of contact with infected wildlife.
- In 2004, 7000 cases of animal rabies were reported in the USA, 2500 of which were in racoons.
- In the USA, but not Canada, rabies is now more commonly reported in cats than in dogs.
- From 2000 to 2006, there were 15 reported cases of human rabies in the USA, nine of which were the result of exposure to bats, and four of which were the result of exposure to rabid dogs. In the same period, only two cases of human rabies were reported in Canada, which were associated with exposure to bats.



## How Is Rabies Spread?



- Rabies virus is usually transmitted by the bite of an infected animal through its saliva. If the saliva gets in the mouth, nose, eyes or a cut on a person or animal, the virus can be transmitted without a bite.
- An animal's bite can be infectious before the animal looks sick.
- The most common source of rabies in human cases worldwide is dogs, but in the USA and Canada it is bats.
- It can be hard to tell if a pet has been bitten by another animal, especially a bat, if the wound is small and covered with fur. People can be bitten by small bats without realizing it, especially if the bat bites them while they are sleeping.

## How Do I Know If My Pet Or A Wild Animal Has Rabies?

The only way to know for sure if an animal has rabies is test for virus in the brain, which cannot be done while the animal is alive. An animal may not show signs of being sick for weeks or months after being infected, but once the signs appear they progress quickly and the animal will die within about ten days. The most obvious sign of rabies is any kind of strange change in behaviour.

- Some animals become very vicious, and will attack other animals, objects or even their own bodies.
- Animals that usually only come out at night, like bats and skunks, may come out during the day.
- Some animals may lose control of their legs and walk strangely, or not be able to walk at all.
- Wild animals may lose their fear of people, which may make them seem friendly, but they're very dangerous.

In a dog or a cat, the first signs may be more subtle. The animal just might not be itself. Sometimes their meow or bark might sound different, and some animals have trouble swallowing and therefore drool a lot. If your pet is behaving strangely, especially if it goes outside a lot, keep it in a quiet area by itself and contact your veterinarian as soon as possible.





## Biting Animals and Rabies Suspects



- **All human-animal bites should be reported to your local health department.** They will likely also recommend that the bitten person should see a doctor right away.
- Any dog, cat or ferret that has bitten a human should be isolated for at least ten days to ensure it does not develop signs of rabies. An infected animal will rarely have virus in its saliva for longer than this before it becomes sick.
- **By law**, ANY animal suspected of having rabies must be reported to the government. If it has bitten a person or pet, the animal may be euthanized and tested for rabies.
- Any unvaccinated pet that is bitten by a potentially rabid animal must either be euthanized or isolated for at least six months to ensure it does not develop rabies. The required isolation period is shorter for vaccinated animals. **Contact your veterinarian as soon as possible if your pet is bitten by any unfamiliar animal.**

## Can Rabies Be Treated?

- There is **NO** effective treatment for rabies. Vaccination is the only way to help prevent infection in animals.
- Any bite wound from a potentially rabid animal, be it in a person or pet, should be cleaned vigorously right away with large volumes of soap and water for 15 minutes, then disinfected with alcohol or povidone iodine to eliminate as much virus as possible from the wound. If a person is bitten they also need to be given antibodies against the virus right away, and then vaccinated several times. In North America, this requires 5 injections in the upper arm muscle (for adults) over 3 weeks. Previously vaccinated animals need a booster right away.

## Rabies Vaccines

- Rabies vaccines are available for dogs, cats and ferrets. These pets should be vaccinated at 3 months of age, boosted one year later, and then annually or every three years, depending on the vaccine used.
- Even if you have an indoor cat, dog or ferret, vaccination is still very important in case your pet ever escapes, or if a bat ever gets into your house. Vaccination could one day save your pet's life, and maybe even yours.

## What Can I Do To Help Control Rabies?

- If you have a dog, cat or ferret, make sure its rabies vaccination is always kept up-to-date.
- Avoid contact with wildlife, especially species that are known to carry rabies, and stray dogs and cats. Always supervise your pet so it does not contact these animals, either.
- It is very important to teach children never to approach or touch ANY unfamiliar animal, even if it seems friendly, or if it looks sick, injured or unconscious.
- Avoid all contact with bats whenever possible, particularly bats seen during the day or found on the ground. Keep bats out of buildings. If you find a bat in your house and it may have been there while someone was sleeping (e.g. overnight) or with an infant, contact your public health department as soon as possible and follow their instructions.
- **If you find a sick animal (wild or domestic) or see one that is acting strangely, contact an animal control professional so that it can be captured and tested.** Never touch or try to capture the animal yourself. A rabid animal can behave very unpredictably.
- Do not leave garbage or pet food outside, as it may attract wild animals to your home.



In adults, the risk of rabies *exposure* from pets is:



**However**, post-exposure vaccination may be much less effective in individuals who are **immunocompromised** (e.g. HIV/AIDS, cancer patients), so they are at slightly *increased risk of becoming ill* if they are exposed to rabies. Young children are more likely than adults to try to touch or pick up an unfamiliar animal, and are also more likely to provoke or frighten an animal and thus be bitten. For children, the risk of rabies *exposure* from pets is likely:

