

# Rabies - Learn the Facts

## What is rabies?

Rabies is a disease of the central nervous system. It is caused by a virus found in the saliva of infected mammals and is transmitted to animals and humans by bites, or possibly by contamination of an open wound with saliva. Prompt preventive treatment is critical for a person who has been exposed to rabies, because there is no cure. Once signs develop, the disease is virtually always fatal.

During 2015, 50 states and Puerto Rico reported 5,508 rabid animals to the CDC, representing an 8.7% decrease from the 6,033 rabid animals reported in 2014. Of the 5,508 cases of animal rabies, 5,088 (92.4%) involved wildlife. Skunks, bats, raccoons, foxes, cats, dogs and some farm animals are most likely to contract - and transmit - rabies. Small rodents and rabbits, whether wild or kept as pets, are rarely involved in transmission of rabies to humans. Rabies does not occur in reptiles, amphibians, fish, birds or insects.

Although the number of human rabies cases has decreased over the past several decades because of stray animal control ordinances and better rabies vaccination coverage for pets, it is still a disease of significant public health concern.

It is important to take steps to protect your family from this threat. Vaccination of pets and livestock can create a preventative buffer between humans and the wildlife reservoirs that harbor the rabies virus.

## Protect your family

- Contact your veterinarian to vaccinate your pets and farm animals.
- Do not attract animals to your home by feeding them. Keep tight fitting lids on garbage cans.
- Keep garage and shed doors closed, and cap all chimneys so animals do not nest in these areas or enter your home.
- Avoid contact with stray or wild animals, even if they are babies. Teach your children to do likewise.
- Contact your physician if you awaken in a bedroom with a bat, or if a bat is discovered in a room with a previously unattended young child. Even if you think no bite has occurred, preventive treatment may be necessary. If possible, try to capture the bat using a container or a heavy blanket, so it can be tested for rabies. This can often eliminate the need to receive the preventive rabies injections.

## Signs of rabies

An animal infected with rabies may show no visible signs for weeks to months. When the disease does manifest itself, the animal may exhibit restlessness, aggression, weakness, paralysis, or seizures. Wild animals may show abnormal behavior such as incoordination, losing their fear of humans, or nocturnal animals being active in the daytime.

## For more information contact:

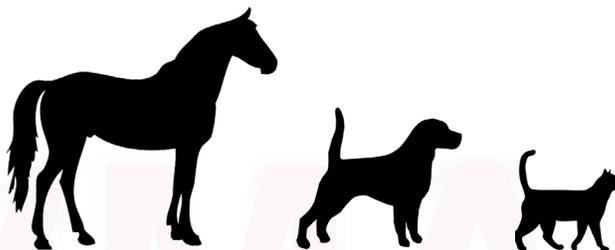
- County or municipal health department for animal bites to humans
- Wisconsin Rabies Control Officer (608) 224-4888 for animals biting animals
- Your local veterinarian

## Protect your pets

Immunizations are available to ensure your dog, cat, ferret or livestock will not get rabies. It is your responsibility to keep your animals' vaccinations up to date. For your pet to be considered legally vaccinated, Wisconsin law requires that a licensed veterinarian or veterinary technician under the direct supervision of a veterinarian provide rabies vaccination to the animal.

State law makes rabies vaccinations mandatory for all dogs. However, in the United States, rabid cats are more than twice as numerous as rabid dogs, so vaccinations of cats is strongly advised by public health agencies. Many municipalities require vaccination of cats.

Protect your pets from stray or wild animals, and make sure they are identified by a license and rabies vaccination tag provided by your veterinarian.



## What to do if you are bitten or scratched by an animal

1. Wash the wound immediately with soap and running water for at least ten minutes.
2. Contact your local public health agency or local law enforcement and see a physician immediately, even for minor wounds. Post-exposure immunizations may need to be given to prevent the disease. However, these injections may be avoided if the biting animal can be observed by a veterinarian or if it can be tested for rabies.
3. If your pet bites someone or has been bitten, immediately confine the pet and contact the local animal control officer or public health agency and check with your pet's veterinarian for rabies vaccination history.
4. If the bite is from a wild or stray animal, attempt to capture the animal if you are sure you can do so without incurring further injury. If bitten by an owned animal, obtain the owner's name, address, and phone number to pass along to public health officials or to law enforcement.
5. Do not destroy an animal which has bitten a human or other animal. Contact the local animal control officer, public health agency, or law enforcement.