

Rabies

Fact Sheet



What is rabies?

Rabies is a fatal disease, caused by a virus that attacks the central nervous system of mammals.

What if I have been exposed?

- **If you have a bat in your home**-do not release it! If the bat was in the room of a sleeping person, unattended child, a mentally impaired individual, or an intoxicated individual-the bat must be tested to rule out rabies. Animal Control can assist with sending the bat for testing.
- **If you are bit by a dog, cat, or ferret**-the animal must be observed for ten days to rule out rabies symptoms. This is called “quarantine” and should be arranged through Animal Control or the Health Department. If the animal cannot be observed, speak to a provider about post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP).
- **If you are bit by a wild or stray animal** and cannot capture it for testing-you need to seek medical attention for guidance on PEP to prevent rabies.

Prevention

Vaccinate pets and livestock. Avoid contact with wild or stray animals. If bitten, immediately wash the wound with soap and water, then seek medical attention. **If Rabies cannot be ruled out, seek PEP through your local Emergency Room.**

How is it spread?

Rabies is spread through the saliva of an infected animal, typically by bites or scratches. Rabies is most commonly found in wild animals such as bats, raccoons, skunks, and foxes. However, any mammal-including dogs and cats-can have rabies. Bats have tiny teeth-it is possible to be bit by a bat while asleep and not detect a bite mark.

Treatment

There is no effective treatment once symptoms of rabies begin. Symptoms may occur weeks to months after exposure. The disease is fatal. Infected animals and humans present with a variety of progressive behavioral and neurologic changes.

