

RABIES FACT SHEET

Rabies is usually thought of as disease that can occur in people who are bitten by dogs. However, in the United States, since most domesticated animals (pets and livestock) are vaccinated for rabies, it is more likely that you will come into contact with rabies from a wild animal rather than from contact with a domesticated animal.

Any warm-blooded animal can carry the virus that causes rabies. You should always be careful around any animal you do not know. If you are bitten by any animal, domestic or wild, or if you come into contact with their saliva (even from a dead animal), seek medical help immediately. Rabies is deadly if you do not get treatment in time.

What Animals Can Carry Rabies?

Any warm-blooded animal can carry the virus that causes rabies, but some are more likely than others to carry and transmit the disease. Observation or testing of the animal can help determine if it has rabies.

- Bats
- Cats
- Cattle
- Coyotes
- Dogs
- Foxes
- Skunks
- Racoons

Rabies is rarely found in rabbits, mice, squirrels, rats and opossums, but consult your physician if you come into contact with any wild animal's saliva.

There also is a vaccine for humans against rabies. People at high risk of

coming in contact with animals with rabies should be vaccinated.

What Is Rabies?

Rabies is a disease caused by a virus. The virus is usually found in the saliva of the infected animal. The virus infects the central nervous system and eventually the brain. Without treatment a rabies infection almost always causes death.

Exposure To Rabies

- Wash with soap and water the wound from a bite or any area of broken skin that has come into contact with saliva from an animal that might have rabies.
- Wash the bite wound (or any area of broken skin that has come into contact with saliva from an animal that might have rabies) with soap and water.
- Contact a doctor or seek emergency medical care right away; treatment should begin as soon as possible after exposure to rabies.

Also contact a doctor or seek emergency care right away if you think you have been exposed to the virus that causes rabies through the air, such as after visiting a cave where bats live or after waking to find a bat in your room, tent or cabin.

What is the Treatment After Exposure To Rabies?

Anti-rabies treatment should begin as soon as possible, ideally within 24 to 48 hours after possible exposure to rabies. If there is a risk that someone has been exposed to rabies, immunization with ready-made antibodies against the rabies virus will be given. The immunization is supplied by a series of injections given over several weeks. In the United States,

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the shots are now given in the upper arm, instead of into the abdomen.

For More Information

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
(888) CDC-FACTS
- National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID)
Send postcard to:
Rabies
NIAID Office of
Communications
31 Center Drive, MSC 2520
Bethesda, MD 20892-2520

Additional Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, *The AMA Encyclopedia of Medicine*

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(*JAMA*. 2000; 284:1052)

Published in *JAMA*: August 23/30, 2000

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