

- Keep your pet from straying, and don't rehome them. The animal must be available for observation by public health authorities or a veterinarian.
- After the observation period, have your pet vaccinated against rabies if their vaccination status is not current.

WHAT IF MY PET HAS BEEN BITTEN?

- Consult your veterinarian immediately, and report the bite to your local animal control authority.
- Even if your dog, cat, or ferret is up-to-date on their vaccines, they will need to be revaccinated immediately, kept under your control, and observed for a period specified by state or local law. Animals that are not up-to-date on rabies vaccines will need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.
- Dogs, cats, and ferrets that have never been vaccinated and are exposed to a rabid animal may need to be euthanized in accordance with applicable regulations or vaccinated against rabies and placed in strict isolation for a minimum of four months (dogs and cats) or for six months (ferrets). Unlike in people, no post-exposure treatment has been approved for animals.
- Animals other than dogs, cats, and ferrets that are bitten by a rabid or potentially rabid animal may need to be euthanized immediately.

WHAT IF I AM BITTEN BY AN ANIMAL?

- Don't panic, but don't ignore the bite. Thoroughly wash the wound with soap and lots of water.
- Call your physician immediately and explain how you were bitten, then follow their advice. If necessary, your physician will give you the post-exposure treatment recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and may also treat you for other possible infections caused by the bite.

- Only if it can be done safely, without risk of you or others being injured further, you can try to confine or capture the animal that bit you. If you do capture the animal, don't try to touch or pick it up. Call the local animal control authorities to collect it. If the animal cannot be captured, try to photograph it or memorize its appearance (size, color, etc.) and where it went after biting you.
- If the animal is wild, only try to capture it if you can do so without further injury to yourself or others. If you decide to kill it, try to do so in a way that preserves the head. The brain will be needed to test for rabies.
- Report the bite to your local health department. With prompt and appropriate treatment after being bitten, the infection can be controlled and disease prevented.

RABIES VACCINE BAIT AND YOUR PET

Bait containing rabies vaccine is commonly used for mass wildlife immunizations. The bait does not pose a health risk to you or your pets, and it's best to leave the bait undisturbed.

Unlike in people, no post-exposure rabies treatment has been approved for animals.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HOW TO KEEP YOUR PET HAPPY AND HEALTHY AS LONG AS POSSIBLE, VISIT:

American Veterinary Medical Association
avma.org/PetOwners

RABIES

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 and the American Veterinary Medical Association*



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WHAT IS RABIES?

Rabies is a deadly disease caused by a virus that attacks the nervous system. The virus is spread to animals or people in saliva, usually through a bite from an infected animal. Less commonly, infection can occur when saliva from a rabid animal contacts an open wound or the eyes, nose, or mouth of another individual.

Signs of rabies typically take weeks to months to develop. Once those signs appear, rabies is nearly always fatal. Fortunately, rabies is entirely preventable through vaccination.

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WHAT ANIMALS CAN GET RABIES?

All mammals are capable of catching and spreading rabies. In the United States, most rabies cases occur in wild animals—mainly bats, raccoons, skunks, foxes, and coyotes.

Among domestic animals, rabies is most common in cats—with hundreds of cases reported each year—followed by cattle and dogs. Rabies also has been diagnosed in horses, goats, sheep, pigs, and ferrets. Nearly all of these infected animals were unvaccinated. Even animals kept solely indoors are at risk if bats get into the home.

Vaccination programs and control of stray animals have been effective in preventing rabies in most pets. Approved rabies vaccines are available for cats, dogs, ferrets, horses, cattle, and sheep. Baits containing oral vaccines also are used for mass immunization of wildlife, particularly raccoons, in targeted areas.

Nearly all pets and other domestic animals diagnosed with rabies were unvaccinated

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF RABIES IN ANIMALS?

Once the rabies virus enters the body, it travels along the nerves to the spinal cord and brain. Infected animals may show a variety of signs, including fearfulness, aggression, excessive drooling, difficulty swallowing or breathing, voice changes, increased sensitivity to noise or light, staggering, tremors, paralysis, seizures, and/or self-mutilation. Aggressive behavior is common, but rabid animals also may be more affectionate than usual. Rabid wild animals may lose their natural fear of humans and behave unusually; for example, an animal that is typically only seen at night may be seen wandering in the daytime.

Although the most common signs of rabies are behavioral changes and unexplained paralysis, rabies should be considered in all animals with unexplained neurological signs. There is no treatment once signs appear. Death usually occurs 4-8 days after signs are first noticed.

Unfortunately, the only way to confirm that an animal has rabies is after death, through examination of its brain tissue with a microscope.

HOW GREAT IS THE RISK OF RABIES TO HUMANS?

Rabies remains a major concern worldwide, killing tens of thousands of people each year. About four in 10 cases occur in children under 15 years of age. Almost all of these deaths are due to bites from infected dogs. Most deaths occur in places with limited rabies control programs or limited access to rabies vaccines and treatment.

In the United States, cases of human rabies are rare, thanks to available vaccines, rabies surveillance, animal vaccination and control programs, and better post-exposure treatment for people bitten by rabid animals. Most human cases stem from exposure to bats. To play it safe, it's wise to report any contact with bats to your physician, even if you don't feel a bite (which can be very small).

Dogs remain a significant source of rabies in other countries, particularly in Asia and Africa. Travelers are advised to seek medical advice about rabies vaccination before traveling outside of the United States.

WHAT CAN I DO TO PROTECT MY PET AND HELP CONTROL RABIES?

As an animal owner, you have an important role to play in protecting animal and human health.



- Have your veterinarian vaccinate your dog, cat, ferret, horse, or livestock. Your veterinarian will work with you to come up with a vaccination plan that best meets your animal's needs and applicable state and local laws.
- Limit the chance of your pet being exposed to rabies by preventing them from roaming free. Keep cats and ferrets indoors, and supervise and/or leash dogs when outside. Spaying or neutering your pet may decrease their urge to roam, and will prevent the birth of unplanned or unwanted animals.
- Avoid leaving exposed garbage or pet food outside. It may attract wild or stray animals.
- Avoid keeping wild animals as pets. Not only may this be illegal, but wild animals pose a potential rabies threat to their caretakers and others.
- Keep your distance from all wild animals. A rabid wild animal may appear tame, and wild animals can carry other diseases that people can catch. Teach children NEVER to handle unfamiliar animals—even if they seem friendly.

- Report strangely behaving wild animals to your local animal control authority.
- Bat-proof your home and other structures to prevent bats from nesting and having access to people or animals.

WHAT IF MY PET BITES SOMEONE?

- Urge the victim to see a physician immediately and to follow the physician's recommendations.
- Check with your veterinarian to determine if your pet's vaccinations are up-to-date.
- Report the bite to the local health department and animal control authority. Regulations may require that your pet be confined and isolated to monitor for signs of rabies.
- Immediately report any illness or unusual behavior your pet displays to your local health department and to your veterinarian.