

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET



COUNTY MICHIGAN
HEALTH DIVISION

Department of Health & Human Services

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Rabies

What is Rabies?

Rabies is a virus that infects the brain of humans, domestic and wild animals.

What are the symptoms of Rabies?

Early Symptoms: Fever, headaches, tiredness, general anxiety or worry and symptoms around the bite such as pain, tingling, numbness.

Later Symptoms: Trouble swallowing, paralysis, seizure, coma and eventual death (nearly 100% fatal).

How long after exposure do symptoms begin?

It may take several weeks (usually two to eight), months, or up to one year to get sick after exposure. This can vary depending upon the size of the wound, amount of nerve supply at the wound, distance from the brain, amount of virus entering the wound and the amount of protective clothing.

How is Rabies spread?

The rabies virus is found in the saliva of infected animals. The virus is spread through a bite or scratch from an infected animal.

What animals are most often affected?

Animals most often affected by rabies are skunks, raccoons, foxes and bats. Bats are the most common source of human rabies infection in the United States. Cats and dogs are rarely found to be rabid.

What about other animals?

It is very rare, but possible, for squirrels, chipmunks, mice, rats, hamsters, rabbits or hares to be infected from the bite of another animal.

How can Rabies be prevented?

- Have a veterinarian vaccinate cats and dogs regularly.
- Do not handle stray or wild animals; call local animal control experts to help.
- Get prompt treatment from your doctor/clinic.



What to do if bitten?

Domestic Animals: Call a veterinarian and follow his/her advice;

- People:
- Clean the wound immediately with soap and warm water; this is the most effective prevention against rabies.
 - Call your doctor, clinic, or Oakland County Health Division for recommendations.
 - Call local animal control office to assist in capture, quarantine and testing of the animal.

What information is needed to help decide if Rabies treatment is required?

- Kind of animal.
- Wild, domestic or stray. (In general, wild animal bites are always of more concern than domestic pets).
- If it was a domestic animal, is the animal vaccinated?
- Was the skin broken from the bite? To what extent? Was there bleeding from the wound?

What are the general guidelines for Rabies treatment?

Rabies treatment is usually recommended for a wild animal bite (especially skunk, raccoons, foxes and bats) and sometimes for bites by domestic animals that are not available for observation/testing.

What is used to prevent Rabies disease?

Two types of treatment must be used together to prevent rabies disease once a person has been exposed:

- Rabies Immune Globulin containing antibodies to fight the virus; AND
- Rabies vaccine – four doses given over two weeks helps you develop your own antibodies to the rabies virus.

What may happen to animals that have bitten someone?

Healthy dogs/cats: Observed for ten days for signs of illness.

Wild and unwanted
Stray animals: Humanely destroyed and brain tissue sent for immediate testing. There is no confinement period for wild animals.

For more information about possible Rabies exposure, call (248) 858-1286 or toll free 1 (800) 848-5533, Ext 8-1286.

For after hours inquiries about possible Rabies exposure, call (248) 858-0931.

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