What is Rabies?

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

What are the symptoms of Rabies?

Early symptoms include: fever, headaches, tiredness, general anxiety or worry, and symptoms around the bite (pain, tingling, and numbness).

Later symptoms include: trouble swallowing, fear of water (hydrophobia), 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 even up to a year to get sick after exposure. This can vary depending upon the size and severity of the wound, amount of nerve supply at the area of the wound, the distance from the brain, and the amount of virus entering the wound.

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, symptomatic animal.

What animals are most often affected in the United States?

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

What about other animals?

It is very rare for squirrels, chipmunks, mice, rats, hamsters, rabbits or hares to be infected from the bite of another animal because they are too small to survive a rabid animal attack.

How can Rabies be prevented?

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

Domestic Animals: call a veterinarian and follow his/her advice.

What to do if you are bitten?

- Clean the wound immediately with soap and warm water for a full five minutes. This is the most effective prevention against rabies.
- Call your doctor, clinic, or Oakland County Health Division for recommendations.
- Call a 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 (RIG) 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: Humanely destroyed and brain tissue sent for immediate testing.
- Stray animals: There is no confinement period for wild animals.

For more information about possible rabies exposure, call (248) 858-1286
Toll free 1 (800) 848-5533 Ext 8:1286 (Monday through Friday, 8:30 am – 5:00 pm)

If you are bitten after hours, seek medical attention for wound care. Your provider will work with the Health Division to report the bite and assess for potential rabies exposure.

To report a sick stray or wild animal, call Oakland County Animal Control at (248) 391-4102.