

Rabies Infection and Animals

What is rabies?

Rabies is a disease caused by the rabies virus. It may take several weeks or even a few years for people to show symptoms after getting infected with rabies, but usually people start to show a sign of the disease 1 to 3 months after are infected. The early signs of rabies can be fever or headache, but this changes quickly to nervous system signs, such as confusion, sleepiness, or agitation; once these symptoms start, that person usually does not survive. This is why it is very important to talk to your doctor or health care provider right away if any animal bites you, especially a wild animal.

Can animals transmit rabies to me?

Yes, many kinds of animal can pass rabies to people. Wild animals are much more likely to carry rabies, especially raccoons, skunks, bats, foxes, and coyotes. However, dogs, cats, cattle, or any warm-blooded animal can pass rabies to people. People usually get rabies from the bite of an infected animal. Most pets, such as dogs, cats, and horses are vaccinated against rabies, but you should always wash any bite you get from a pet right away and check with your health care provider about what to do.

How can I protect myself from getting rabies?

Be a responsible pet owner:

- Keep vaccinations up to date for all dogs, cats, horses and ferrets. This requirement is important not only to keep your pets from getting rabies, but also to provide a barrier of protection for you, if your animal is bitten by a rabid wild animal.
- Keep your pets under close supervision to limit contact with wild animals. If your pet is bitten by a wild animal, seek veterinary assistance for the animal immediately.
- Call your local animal control agency to remove any stray animals from your neighborhood. They may be unvaccinated and could be infected by the disease.
- Spay or neuter your pets to help reduce the number of unwanted pets that may not be properly cared for or regularly vaccinated.

Avoid direct contact with unfamiliar animals:

- Enjoy wild animals (raccoons, skunks, foxes) from afar. **NEVER** handle, feed, or unintentionally attract wild animals with open garbage cans or litter.
- **NEVER** adopt wild animals or bring them into your home. Do not try to nurse sick animals to health. Call animal control or an animal rescue agency for assistance.
- Teach children **NEVER** to handle unfamiliar animals, wild or domestic, even if they appear friendly. "Love your own, leave other animals alone" is a good principle for children to learn.
- Prevent bats and other rodents (skunks, raccoons etc.) from entering living quarters, occupied spaces in homes, churches, schools, and other similar areas, where they might come in contact with people and pets. Block access to crawl spaces of homes and porches, secure or destroy abandoned buildings so wild animals don't seek shelter in them.
- When traveling abroad, avoid direct contact with wild animals and be especially careful around dogs in developing countries. Rabies is common in developing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America where dogs are the major reservoir of rabies. Tens of thousands of people die of rabies each year in these countries. Before traveling abroad, consult with a health care provider, travel clinic, or your health department about the risk of exposure to rabies, pre-exposure prophylaxis, and how you should handle an exposure, should it arise.

More information about rabies?

Learn more about rabies at CDC's [Rabies site](#), and [Rabies Kids Rabies Home Page](#) which includes questions and answers, prevention and control information, and more.