



**PREVENTING  
RABIES**



## What is rabies?

Rabies is a disease of animals and people. Rabies is caused by a virus that attacks the brain and nerves. Once the virus is inside people, it spreads through the body and kills the victims, if they are not treated quickly. The good news is that rabies in humans, pets, and livestock can be prevented by a vaccine. For people who are bitten or scratched by a rabid animal, prompt treatment will protect the person from getting rabies. Treatment usually involves 5 shots of safe and effective vaccine in the arm and one shot of another medicine called Human Rabies Immune Globulin (HRIG).

## How is rabies spread?

The rabies virus is spread through the saliva (spit) of a rabid animal, usually because a rabid animal bites or scratches another person or animal. The virus may also get into the body through open cuts or wounds, or through the eyes, nose, or mouth.

## What animals can spread rabies?

Rabies is spread mostly by wild animals. In the United States and Canada, rabies is usually found in raccoons, skunks, foxes, coyotes, woodchucks, and bats. Domestic animals like dogs, cats, ferrets, and farm animals can get rabies from wild animals. This is why it's so important to vaccinate pets and livestock. These are the animals that people are around the most. Pets and stray dogs and cats can act like a bridge between wild animals and people, bringing rabies from wild animals into your home.

Any mammal (animals that have fur and are warm-blooded) can get rabies. Birds, fish, snakes, and amphibians do not carry rabies. Although it is possible for rodents to get the disease, animals like mice, rats, and squirrels almost never carry rabies.

## What about bats and rabies?

Bats can be dangerous carriers of rabies because their bite or scratch may be too small to notice. A bat's teeth and claws are so small that a bite may not bleed or even hurt. In fact, people sleeping in the same room where a bat is found, or children who have been alone in a room with a bat, should see a doctor.

## What if I have bats in my house?

If you have to have to capture a bat, follow these directions to protect yourself:

1. Close the windows, closet doors, and the door to the room.
2. Turn on the lights if the room is dark, and wait for the bat to land.
3. Wear thick gloves and cover the bat with a coffee can or other hard container.
4. Slide a piece of cardboard under the can, trapping the bat.
5. Tape the cardboard tightly to the can.
6. Immediately contact your local health agency to have the bat tested for rabies.

Any live or dead bat that may have had contact with a person should be tested for rabies. If the test results are positive for rabies, if the bat cannot be found, or if the bat has escaped and has had contact with a person, see a doctor as soon as possible.

## How can I tell if an animal has rabies?

You can't tell if an animal has rabies. When an animal is sick with rabies, it may behave strangely. But a rabid animal may also appear healthy or even tame. The only way to tell if an animal has rabies is by testing it in a laboratory, or for some pets and livestock, by a quarantine to see if rabies develops.

## What can I do to prevent rabies?

- Vaccinate your pets! Cats, dogs, and ferrets all need to be vaccinated by a veterinarian regularly. If you own livestock, you can make sure their vaccinations are up-to-date.
- Do not feed or handle wild animals. Teach children that although a baby skunk or raccoon may look cute and friendly, it can be very dangerous.
- Do not feed or touch stray animals, and avoid all sick or strange-acting animals.
- Cover your garbage cans, and don't leave pets' food outside where it can attract wild animals.
- Do not keep wild animals as pets. Not only is this dangerous for you and the animal, it's also against the law.
- Do not touch or pick up dead animals.
- Leave bats alone.
- Never handle a bat, especially with bare hands. Use thick gloves, tongs, or a shovel to remove a dead bat, or call in bat-removal experts. Don't crush the bat with a tennis racquet or other object.
- Do not let your pet play with bats.
- Keep bats out of the house or other buildings by closing or covering the attic or other dark sheltered areas. Put screens on the windows.



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