

Questions and Answers about Rabies

Pets

734-727-7000

How can I protect my pet from rabies?

There are several things you can do to protect your pet from rabies. First, visit your veterinarian with your pet on a regular basis and keep rabies vaccinations up-to-date for all cats, ferrets, and dogs. Second, maintain control of your pets by keeping cats and ferrets indoors and keeping dogs under direct supervision. Third, spay or neuter your pets to help reduce the number of unwanted pets that may not be properly cared for or vaccinated regularly. Lastly, call animal control to remove all stray animals from your neighborhood since these animals may be unvaccinated or ill.

Why does my pet need the rabies vaccine?

Although the majority of rabies cases occur in wildlife, most humans are given rabies vaccine as a result of exposure to domestic animals. While wildlife are more likely to be rabid than are domestic animals in the United States, the amount of human contact with domestic animals greatly exceeds the amount of contact with wildlife. Your pets and other domestic animals can be infected when they are bitten by rabid wild animals. Pets are therefore vaccinated by your veterinarian to prevent them from acquiring the disease from wildlife, and thereby transmitting it to humans.

What happens if a neighborhood dog or cat bites me?

You should seek medical evaluation for any animal bite. However, rabies is uncommon in dogs, cats, and ferrets in the United States. Very few bites by these animals carry a risk of rabies. If the cat (or dog or ferret) appeared healthy at the time you were bitten, it can be confined by its owner for 10 days and observed. No anti-rabies prophylaxis is needed. No person in the United States has ever contracted rabies from a dog, cat or ferret held in quarantine for 10 days. If a dog, cat, or ferret appeared ill at the time it bit you or becomes ill during the 10 day quarantine, it should be evaluated by a veterinarian for signs of rabies and you should seek medical advice about the need for anti-rabies prophylaxis. The quarantine period is a precaution against the remote possibility that an animal may appear healthy, but actually be sick with rabies.

What happens if my pet (cat, dog, ferret) is bitten by a wild animal?

Any animal bitten or scratched by either a wild, carnivorous mammal or a bat that is not available for testing should be regarded as having been exposed to rabies. Unvaccinated dogs, cats, and ferrets exposed to a rabid animal should be euthanized immediately. If the owner is unwilling to have this done, the animal should be placed in strict isolation for 6 months and vaccinated 1 month before being released. Animals with expired vaccinations need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Dogs and cats that are currently vaccinated are kept under observation for 45 days.

Human Rabies

How do people get rabies?

People usually get rabies from the bite of a rabid animal. It is also possible, but quite rare, that people may get rabies if infectious material from a rabid animal, such as saliva, gets directly into their eyes, nose, mouth, or a wound.

Can I get rabies in any way other than an animal bite?

Non-bite exposures to rabies are very rare. Scratches, abrasions, open wounds, or mucous membranes contaminated with saliva or other potentially infectious material (such as brain tissue) from a rabid animal constitute non-bite exposures. Other contact, such as petting a rabid animal or contact with the blood, urine or feces (e.g., guano) of a rabid animal, does not constitute an exposure and is not an indication for prophylaxis.

How soon after an exposure should I seek medical attention?

Medical assistance should be obtained as soon as possible after an exposure. There have been no human cases of rabies when vaccine treatment has been given promptly and appropriately after an exposure.

What medical attention do I need if I am exposed to rabies?

One of the most effective methods to decrease the chances for infection involves thorough washing of the wound with soap and water. Specific medical attention for someone exposed to rabies is called postexposure prophylaxis or PEP. In the United States, postexposure prophylaxis consists of a regimen of one dose of immune globulin and five doses of rabies vaccine over a 28-day period. Current vaccines are relatively painless and are given in your arm, like a flu or tetanus vaccine.

What are the symptoms of rabies infection?

Rabies virus infects the central nervous system, causing encephalopathy and ultimately death. Early symptoms of rabies in humans are nonspecific, consisting of fever, headache, and general malaise. As the disease progresses, neurological symptoms appear and may include insomnia, anxiety, confusion, slight or partial paralysis, excitation, hallucinations, agitation, hypersalivation, difficulty swallowing, and hydrophobia (fear of water). Death usually occurs within days of the onset of symptoms.

Will the rabies vaccine make me sick?

Adverse reactions to rabies vaccine and immune globulin are not common. Newer vaccines in use today cause fewer adverse reactions than previously available vaccines. Mild, local reactions to the rabies vaccine, such as pain, redness, swelling, or itching at the injection site, have been reported. Rarely, symptoms such as headache, nausea, abdominal pain, muscle aches, and dizziness have been reported. Local pain and low-grade fever may follow injection of rabies immune globulin.

What if I cannot get rabies vaccine on the day I am supposed to get my next dose?

Consult with your doctor or state or local public health officials for recommended times if there is going to be a change in the recommended schedule of shots. Rabies prevention is a serious matter and changes should not be made in the schedule of doses.

Can rabies be transmitted from one person to another?

The only well-documented documented cases of rabies caused by human-to-human transmission occurred among 8 recipients of transplanted corneas, and recently among three recipients of solid organs. Casual contact, such as touching a person with rabies or contact with non-infectious fluid or tissue (urine, blood, feces) does not constitute an exposure and does not require postexposure prophylaxis.

Wild Animals**What animals get rabies?**

Any mammal can get rabies. The most common wild reservoirs of rabies are raccoons, skunks, bats, foxes, and coyotes. Domestic mammals can also get rabies. Cats, cattle, and dogs are the most frequently reported rabid domestic animals in the United States.

What is the risk of rabies from squirrels, mice, rats, and other rodents?

Small rodents (such as squirrels, rats, mice, hamsters, guinea pigs, gerbils, and chipmunks) and lagomorphs (such as rabbits and hares) are almost never found to be infected with rabies and have not been known to cause rabies among humans in the United States. Bites by these animals are usually not considered a risk of rabies unless the animal was sick or behaving in any unusual

manner and rabies is widespread in your area. In all cases involving rodents, the state or local health department should be consulted before a decision is made to initiate postexposure prophylaxis (PEP).

Bats and Rabies

Do bats get rabies?

Yes. Bats are mammals and are susceptible to rabies, but most do not have the disease. You cannot tell if a bat has rabies just by looking at it; rabies can be confirmed only by having the animal tested in a laboratory. To minimize the risk for rabies, it is best never to handle any bat.

What should I do if I come in contact with a bat?

If you are bitten by a bat -- or if infectious material (such as saliva) from a bat gets into your eyes, nose, mouth, or a wound -- wash the affected area thoroughly and get medical attention immediately. Whenever possible, the bat should be captured and sent to a laboratory for rabies testing. People usually know when they have been bitten by a bat. However, because bats have small teeth which may leave marks that are not easily seen, there are situations in which you should seek medical advice even in the absence of an obvious bite wound. For example, if you awaken and find a bat in your room, see a bat in the room of an unattended child, or see a bat near a mentally impaired or intoxicated person, seek medical advice and have the bat tested. People cannot get rabies just from seeing a bat in an attic, in a cave, or at a distance. In addition, people cannot get rabies from having contact with bat guano (feces), blood, or urine, or from touching a bat on its fur (even though bats should never be handled!).

What should I do if I find a bat in my home?

If you see a bat in your home and you are sure no human or pet exposure has occurred, confine the bat to a room by closing all doors and windows leading out of the room except those to the outside. The bat will probably leave soon. If not, it can be caught, as described below, and released outdoors away from people and pets. However, if there is any question of exposure, leave the bat alone and call animal control or a wildlife conservation agency for assistance. If professional assistance is unavailable, use precautions to capture the bat safely, as described below.

What you will need:

- leather work gloves (put them on)
- small box or coffee can
- piece of cardboard
- tape

When the bat lands, approach it slowly and place a box or coffee can over it. Slide the cardboard under the container to trap the bat inside. Tape the cardboard to the container securely. Contact your health department or animal control authority to make arrangements for rabies testing.

How can I tell if a bat has rabies?

Rabies can be confirmed only in a laboratory. However, any bat that is active by day, is found in a place where bats are not usually seen (for example in rooms in your home or on the lawn), or is unable to fly, is far more likely than others to be rabid. Such bats are often the most easily approached. Therefore, it is best never to handle any bat.

More Information

For more information, call the Wayne County Department of Public Health at 734-727-7000 or visit <http://www.cdc.gov/>