



# Rabies

## Prevention and Care

### What is Rabies?

- ⇒ **Rabies is a fatal disease** transmitted from animals to humans, caused by a virus that attacks the central nervous system.
- ⇒ This virus is present in the saliva of a rabid animal and is transmitted primarily by animal bites. It is rarely transmitted if the saliva comes in contact with open wounds, fresh abrasions, or mucous membranes.
- ⇒ **All warm-blooded animals can be affected by the virus**, but it is most often found in wildlife such as raccoons, skunks, foxes, and bats. Dogs and cats may also contract rabies if they are not vaccinated against it. Rabies is rarely seen in rodents such as mice, rats, squirrels, chipmunks, guinea pigs, hamsters, or in rabbits. Birds, turtles, lizards, fish, and insects do not contract rabies.

### Prevention

- ✓ **Get vaccinated if you handle wild or stray animals.** For example, if you work at an animal shelter or with animal control, getting vaccinated will protect you. Treatment includes a first dose of vaccine and another protective injection. Then 4 more doses of vaccine are administered over 28 days.
- ✓ **Vaccinate your pets.** Cats, dogs and ferrets can be vaccinated against rabies. Ask your veterinarian how often your pets should be vaccinated. This is important because your pet then can transfer the virus to you. Smaller pets like rabbits and guinea pigs cannot be vaccinated, so protect them from contact with wild animals.
- ✓ **Supervise your pets.** Keep your pets inside and supervise them when outside. Roaming pets are more likely to be exposed to rabies.

- ✓ **Report stray animals to local authorities.** You can call your local animal control center.
- ✓ **Don't approach wild animals and teach your children to stay away from wild animals.** Wild animals with rabies may seem unafraid of people. It's not normal for a wild animal to be friendly with people, so stay away from any animal that seems unafraid and call the local animal control number.
- ✓ **Do not feed wild animals.** Food will persuade the animal to keep coming back. If this animal has rabies or gets exposed to rabies, it puts you at risk.
- ✓ **Keep animals out of your home.** Seal any cracks and gaps where bats can enter your home. Do not leave your doors or windows open, especially if you live in a rural area. Rabid animals may wander into your home. If a wild/stray animal enters your home, call the local animal control center immediately, go into another room, and close the door.
- ✓ **Consider the rabies vaccine if you're traveling.** If you're traveling to a country where rabies is common and you'll be there for a long period of time, ask your doctor whether you should receive the rabies vaccine.

### Symptoms of Rabies in Pets and Animals

- Be unnaturally withdrawn
- Be unusually friendly or calm
- Be very docile
- Snap at anything in its path
- Appear in the daytime (if it's nocturnal)
- Search for an isolated place to die.



### Symptoms of Rabies in Humans

*Once signs of rabies appear, the disease is almost always fatal. That is why prevention is so important.*

- Tingling or twitching sensation around the area of the animal bite
- Fever
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Fatigue
- Can progress within days to cerebral dysfunction, anxiety, confusion, and agitation
- Can progress further to delirium, hallucinations, and insomnia

## If **YOU** are bitten or scratched by a wild/stray animal:

- ◇ **Immediately wash the wound thoroughly**, cleaning and flushing with plenty of soap and water for several minutes.
- ◇ **Immediately report all animal bites to your local health department.** It is a state law that you have to report all animal bites. Also, ask them what to do for a follow up.
- ◇ **You can call animal control** and see if they will come get the animal. Watch the animal until animal control arrives, so you can identify its location to them, but do not go near the animal again.
- ◇ **Get prompt medical attention.** Call your family doctor or go to the nearest emergency room.

## If your **PETS** are bitten or scratched by a wild/stray animal:

- ◇ **Call your pet away from the animal.**
- ◇ To prevent exposure of the virus to yourself, it is recommended that you **do not handle pets**, touch or examine your dog or cat for at least two hours following its contact with the other animal.
- ◇ If you must handle your pet, wear heavy gloves and be sure to thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water.
- ◇ **Contact your doctor or local health department** for advice to determine whether or not there may have been any direct exposure to the rabies.
- ◇ **Contact your local health department immediately for advice** about testing the wild animal for rabies and follow-up for your pet.

Remember, call animal control in any case that you or a pet is bitten or scratched by a wild or stray animal. That animal needs to be tested for rabies. It is a state law.