

Rabies Fact Sheet



What is rabies?

Rabies is a fatal disease caused by a virus that affects the central nervous system of warm-blooded animals, including humans. The most common animals that can carry rabies are raccoons, skunks, bats, foxes and coyotes. Domestic animals such as cats, dogs and cattle can also get rabies if exposed to an infected animal.

How is it spread?

The rabies virus is spread by contact with the saliva of an infected animal, generally from a bite, scratch or lick. It can also be spread by contact with the mouth, nose and eyes, or with an open cut, sore or wound. Careless handling of a dead rabid animal can also spread the virus.

What are the symptoms of rabies in animals?

Animals with rabies may show many different signs and symptoms. Rabies can take two basic forms, furious and dumb rabies. Animals with rabies may show a combination of the two forms of rabies, or may show no clinical symptoms at all.

- Animals with furious rabies may become violent or aggressive without any reason, attacking anything they see. These animals may also gnaw or bite their own limbs
- Animals with dumb rabies may show signs of depression, and become easily frightened or unusually tame. This may cause a wild animal to approach humans
- Rabid animals may also show signs of partial paralysis in the hind limbs, excessive drooling, or "foaming of the mouth"

If your pet has these symptoms or behaves strangely, contact your veterinarian immediately.

What are the symptoms of rabies in humans?

Early symptoms are usually flu-like and can include fever, headache and nausea. As the disease develops symptoms may include insomnia, anxiety, slight or partial paralysis, hallucinations and difficulty swallowing. Death can occur within days of symptoms appearing, usually as a result of respiratory failure.

Once symptoms appear, rabies is usually fatal.

What should I do if I am bitten or scratched by an animal?

If you are bitten or scratched by an animal:

- 1) Wash the wound with soap and warm water and get medical attention immediately.**
- 2) Report the event to York Region Community and Health Services Department as soon as possible, through the York Region *Health Connection* line at 1-800-361-5653.**

If the animal involved cannot be located, you will be asked to contact your health care provider. At this time your health care provider will discuss the need for treatment with you.

What is the treatment for rabies?

There is a vaccine available for people who may have been exposed to the rabies virus. Contact your health care provider if you have been bitten or scratched by an animal. Your health care provider will discuss post-exposure treatment with you.

A pre-exposure rabies vaccine is available for people who are at a higher risk of being exposed to rabies. Veterinarians, vet techs, animal control officers, spelunkers and anyone who comes into contact with wild animals should discuss pre-exposure vaccine with their health care provider.

How can I protect myself and my family?

There are many ways you can protect yourself and your family from rabies:

- Keep vaccinations up to date for all your dogs and cats. (Under Ontario law, all dogs over three months of age and all cats are required to be immunized against rabies)
- Avoid feeding, handling or coming into contact with all wild or unfamiliar animals
- Teach your children to stay away from all unfamiliar animals, wild and domestic
- Protect your pets from contact with wild animals by keeping them on a leash when they are off your property
- If you are concerned about your pet after it has been in contact with a wild animal, please call the Canadian Food Inspection Agency at **905-513-2850**
- Do not touch dead or sick animals. If you must, wear thick protective gloves and use a shovel; never touch the dead animal with your bare hands
- Report sick animals to your local animal control agency; do not try to assist a sick or dying animal
- Keep wild animals away from your home and your property
- When travelling outside of Canada, stay away from wild animals and be especially careful around dogs in developing countries
- Wash any wound from an animal thoroughly and contact York Region *Health Connection* at **1-800-361-5653** to report the animal bite or scratch

Should I be concerned about bats and rabies?

Bats are capable of spreading the rabies virus to humans, and unlike other mammals bats cannot be vaccinated against the virus. Bats have very small, needle like teeth resulting in bites that may not be felt, especially if you are sleeping, or unaware (i.e. intoxicated or mentally challenged).

For more information on rabies and bats, as well as how to bat-proof your home, please see the *Keeping Bats Out of Your Home* pamphlet.