



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Rabies

What is rabies?

Rabies is a viral disease that infects the brain and spinal cord of mammals, including humans. It is almost always fatal.

How is rabies spread?

Rabies is spread by the bite of a rabid animal. Rabies virus may produce changes in animals that make them more likely to bite. This helps spread the virus. Rabies may also be spread when saliva comes in contact with an open wound or the eyes.

Which animals can spread rabies?

Indiana animals that may spread rabies to humans are bats, skunks, foxes, and raccoons. Bats are the most likely to have rabies. Dogs and cats can also spread rabies that they have caught from wildlife, but this seldom happens in Indiana.

What are the symptoms of rabies in animals?

One of the first signs of rabies in an animal is a change in behavior. A calm animal may become aggressive, or a very active animal may seem depressed. Some animals may have trouble walking or have a "dull" or "vacant" look. Rabid wild animals can lose their fear of humans, and nocturnal (active at night) animals might be seen during daylight hours.

What are the symptoms of rabies in humans?

The first sign of rabies in humans is often a feeling of apprehension and itching or tingling where the bite happened. Other signs of rabies in humans are headache, weakness, paralysis, and death. Some people may not be able to swallow.

Who is at risk for rabies?

Anyone who has had been exposed to a rabid animal may be at risk rabies.

How can rabies be treated?

Rabies cannot be cured and is almost always fatal. Efforts are focused to prevent exposure or provide vaccines that will prevent disease.

How is rabies prevented?

You can avoid getting rabies by:

- don't pet animals you don't know
- don't touch animals that are sleeping, injured, eating, or caring for young
- avoid wild animals - enjoy them from a distance
- don't let wildlife enter your house, garage, storage sheds, or other areas
- don't leave pet food out where it will attract wildlife
- keep garbage containers closed and secure
- **HAVE YOUR PETS VACCINATED AGAINST RABIES** – a vaccinated pet is a barrier between you and rabid wildlife.

What should I do if an animal bites me?

If an animal bites you, there are a few simple steps you can take:

- Wash the wound with lots of soap and running water
- Go to a doctor or emergency room if the bite is severe or bleeding
- Tell your doctor that an animal bit you
- Make sure you have a current tetanus vaccine
- Take antibiotics if your doctor prescribes them
- If possible and without causing more injury, try to identify or capture the animal that bite you
- Tell your local health department or animal control agency. The animal may need to be tested or quarantined.

Can rabies disease be prevented?

If you are exposed to rabies, the disease can be prevented with shots. People who are in high-risk jobs (veterinarians, wildlife workers/rehabilitators, animal control officers, and rabies laboratory workers) should get rabies vaccine before working with animals.

Rabies can also be prevented by getting vaccines after an exposure has happened but before signs develop (post-exposure prophylaxis). Correct treatment can prevent rabies.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to your local health department or veterinarian.

For additional information on rabies, go to:
<http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/>
<http://www.in.gov/isdh/20518.htm>

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