

Rabies

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Rabies is a virus. It is spread through saliva or brain/nervous system tissue. You can only get rabies by coming in contact with any of those. Usually, this is from being bitten.

Contact such as petting or handling an animal, or contact with blood, urine or feces does not spread the rabies virus.

Rabies is preventable. Without treatment, rabies often causes death.

Children are often at greatest risk from rabies.

Call your primary care provider right away if you think or know you were bitten by an animal that does not have a current rabies vaccination.

How to Confirm Rabies

- In animals, rabies is confirmed by testing the brain. The test requires that the animal be put down. Test results are ready within a few hours to a few days.
 - If the animal is a healthy pet dog, cat or ferret:
 - The animal should be confined and watched for 10 days. Call the vet right away if the pet shows signs of illness.
 - If the animal is wild and you can't capture it:
 - Call your health care provider right away.

- In people, many tests are needed. There is not just one test that can confirm rabies. Tests are done on samples of saliva, spinal fluid and skin biopsies of hair follicles, among others.

It's important to get tested as quickly as possible.

Symptoms of Rabies

Call your primary care provider right away if you have been bitten and have any of the following symptoms.

- The first symptoms of rabies may be similar to those of the flu such as general weakness or discomfort, fever or headache. Symptoms may last for days.
- There may be also discomfort or a prickling or itching sensation at the site of bite.
- As the disease gets worse, symptoms include anxiety, confusion, agitation, delirium, hallucinations and insomnia.

Without treatment, the survival rate of rabies is almost zero.

Treatment

Your primary care provider, who may work with your state or local health department, will decide if you need a rabies vaccination.

Treatment is 1 dose of immune globulin and four 4 of rabies vaccine given over 14 days.

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Rabies immune globulin and the first dose of rabies vaccine should be given by your primary care provider as soon as possible after exposure. Other doses should be given on days 3, 7 and 14 after the first vaccination.

Current vaccines are given in your arm, like a flu or tetanus shot.

The decision to start vaccination will be partly based on your type of exposure, the animal you were exposed to and where the exposure happened.

What to Do if You are Bitten or Think You May Have Rabies

- Wash the bite area right away. Use soap and water and wash the area well.
- Call your primary care provider. They will give you direction.
- If you were bitten by a cat, dog or ferret you know, follow the directions on the front.
- If you were bitten by a bat, try to safely capture it, if possible. Call your primary care provider right away.
- If you were bitten by a wild animal such as a raccoon, coyote, fox or skunk, call your health care provider right away.

Small animals such as rabbits, hamsters, gerbils, guinea pigs, squirrels, chipmunks, rats, mice, gophers, moles and shrews, are not a risk for rabies.

How to Prevent Rabies

- If you have a dog, cat or ferret:
 - make sure your pet gets regular rabies vaccinations
 - keep your cat or ferret inside and watch your dog when outside
 - spay or neuter your pet.
- Call animal control if you see a stray animal in your neighborhood.
 - Don't approach it because you don't know if the animal is sick.

- Teach children not to touch any animal without adult approval.
- Never let children be alone with animals.
- Check your house to make sure bats can't get inside.

Special Travel Directions

- If you are traveling outside of the U.S., talk with your primary care provider or schedule a travel consultation. This is especially important if you are:
 - staying in an area for more than 24 hours away from medical care
 - working with animals or wildlife
 - planning to be outside of the U.S. for a longer stay.
- If you have a bite or scratch from a dog, bat or other animal listed on the front page, call a health care provider, even if you received the rabies vaccine.

For More Information

- Minnesota Department of Health
 - 651-201-5000
 - health.state.mn.us
- Wisconsin Department of Health
 - 608-266-1865
 - dhs.wisconsin.gov
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
 - cdc.gov/rabies

Adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention