

# RABIES & ANIMAL BITE EXPOSURE

## PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

### **What is Rabies?**

*Rabies is an acute, fatal disease that is transmitted to humans by exposure to rabid animals.*

### **How is the virus transmitted?**

The rabies virus is present in the saliva of an infected animal. The virus is spread through a bite or scratch from an infected animal or through contact with intact mucous membranes. The virus spreads in the body and enters the brain, where it causes severe disease and is almost always fatal. The incubation period in humans is 3-8 weeks, and sometimes as short as a few days, or as long as several years.

### **What animals can transmit rabies?**

Wild animals most likely to harbor rabies are the bat, skunk, fox, wolf, and raccoon. It is possible, but not as likely, for dogs, cats, ferrets, cattle, horses, sheep, goats, swine, bobcats, and coyotes to be rabid.

### **How do I know if an animal is rabid?**

It's not easy! People tend to think that rabid animals always drool and foam at the mouth. However, most rabid animals only display these symptoms in the late stage of the disease, and sometimes not even then.

Rabid animals may stagger, appear restless, aggressive, change their tone of bark or growl, or appear to be choking. Typically wild animals may act friendly. Animals that are normally active at night may become active during the day. Passive animals may become fierce or aggressive.

### **How do I know if I have been exposed to rabies virus?**

A rabies exposure can be defined as a bite or non-bite exposure. A bite exposure includes any penetration of the skin by the teeth of a rabid animal, while in a non-bite exposure, the saliva of an infected animal comes in contact with abrasions, open wounds, or mucous membranes.

### **What should I do if I am exposed?**

- Wash the affected area thoroughly with soap and water.
- See your doctor (or go to emergency) immediately for a medical evaluation.
- Your doctor will clean and evaluate the exposure area, assess the need for anti-rabies treatment, a tetanus-diphtheria booster, and antibiotic treatment.

### **What is current anti-rabies treatment like?**

The current treatment consists of four injections of vaccine over a 14 day period, and immediate administration of rabies immune globulin. If treatment is recommended by a physician, it should be started as soon as possible after the exposure.

### **Do I need to report the animal bite or possible rabies exposure?**

- Report animal bites/possible rabies exposures to the Livingston County Animal Control (517) 546-2154, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. If a possible exposure occurs after hours or on a weekend, call 911.
- Consultation regarding animal bite exposures are available through LCDPH by calling (517) 546-9850.

LIVINGSTON COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH  
2300 E. GRAND RIVER AVE., SUITE 102, HOWELL, MI 48843-7578  
(517) 546-9850  
www.lchd.org

### **What do I do with an animal that has bitten or scratched a person?**

Consider the type of animal:

- A healthy domestic cat, dog, or ferret with current rabies vaccine documentation or an unvaccinated domestic animal should be confined to the owner's home for 10 days for observation. At the end of the observation period the animal should be checked by an animal control officer or a vet and certified free from rabies.
- If the vaccinated or unvaccinated domestic animal develops symptoms of rabies during the observation period, euthanize and test for rabies immediately.
- The unvaccinated animal that remains healthy at the end of the observation period should be vaccinated for rabies.
- A stray domestic animal that appears healthy may be confined for 4 days to await owners claim. If animal not claimed, it may be euthanized and tested for rabies.
- A stray domestic animal that appears ill should be euthanized and tested for rabies.
- Captured wild animals should always be euthanized and tested for rabies immediately.
- Mice, hamsters, gerbils and other small rodents are not usually tested because the risk of rabies is rare in these animals.