

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 transmitted through a break in the skin caused by the teeth of a rabid animal, or by contamination of scratches, abrasions or mucous membranes with the saliva from an infected animal. The virus spreads in the body and enters the brain, where it causes severe disease that is almost always fatal. The incubation period in humans is 4-6 weeks but ranges five days to more than one year.

What animals can transmit rabies?

Wild animals most likely to harbor rabies in Michigan are the bat, skunk, fox 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?

Exposure is defined as either 1) bite exposure=any penetration of the skin by teeth, or 2) non-bite exposure=saliva of an infected animal coming in contact with abrasion, open wounds, or mucous membranes.

What should I do if I am exposed?

- Wash the affected area thoroughly with soap and water.
- Get a medical evaluation immediately with your own doctor or at the emergency room.
- 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?

- It consists of five injections of vaccine over a 28 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 (517) 546-9850.

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

Consider the type of animal:

- Captured wild animals should always be euthanized and tested for rabies immediately.
- A domestic cat, dog, or ferret that has up-to-date rabies shot documentation shall be confined to the owner's home for 10 days IF NOT ILL.
- If the (vaccinated) animal has symptoms of rabies or develops symptoms during the 10 days, it must be euthanized immediately and tested for rabies.
- Mice, hamsters, gerbils and other small rodents will usually NOT be tested, because the risk of rabies is so rare in these animals.
- An unvaccinated domestic animal should be confined for 10 days for observation. If it becomes ill, it must be euthanized and examined. If not, after confinement it should be vaccinated for rabies.
- A stray that appears ill should be euthanized promptly and examined for rabies.
- A stray that appears healthy may be confined for 4 days to await an owner's claim. If there is no claim, the animal may be euthanized and tested for rabies.

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