



# Rabies

FACT SHEET 13-001-0911

## Key facts

- Rabies is preventable. Do not approach, feed or handle wild or stray animals. Do not keep pets or mascots while deployed.
- You cannot always tell if an animal has rabies. Not all animals infected with rabies appear sick or display abnormal behavior.
- If you are bitten or if an animal's saliva contacts your broken skin, eyes or mouth, immediately wash the area with soap and water and seek medical attention.

## What is rabies?

Rabies is a viral disease that affects the central nervous system. It is transmitted from infected mammals to humans and, if untreated, is almost always fatal.

## How do people get rabies?

People get rabies from contact with a rabid animal. The exposure is nearly always through a bite, but rabies can also be transmitted if a rabid animal's saliva comes into contact with a person's broken skin, eyes or mouth. *It is important to note that in developing countries, dogs are the main source of the rabies virus. In the U.S. and other developed nations where pets are vaccinated, bats and wild animals become the major concern.*

## Can all animals transmit rabies?

No. Only mammals (warm-blooded animals with fur) carry rabies. Dogs, cats, bats, foxes, skunks, raccoons, and jackals are among the most likely mammals to transmit the virus. Small rodents, such as mice and rats, rarely transmit the disease. Outside of the U.S. and other developed countries, dogs are by far the most common source of rabies.

## How can I tell if an animal has rabies?

Often you cannot. Despite the common belief that rabid animals are easily identified by foaming at the mouth and aggressive behavior, infected animals may not look sick or act strange. All bites or contact with saliva from animals should be evaluated by a qualified medical provider in consultation with a veterinarian.

## How do I prevent rabies?

Rabies is preventable. Do not approach, feed or handle wild or stray animals. Do not keep pets or mascots while deployed. Seek medical attention immediately if bitten or exposed to animal saliva or other body fluids.

## What are the symptoms of rabies?

Early symptoms include irritability, headache, fever and itching or pain at the exposure site. The disease eventually progresses to spasms of the throat and the muscles used for breathing, seizures, paralysis and death. Once symptoms appear, rabies is nearly always fatal.

## How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

The time between exposure and the onset of symptoms—the incubation period—varies but averages two to twelve weeks in humans. In rare cases, symptoms may not appear for over one year.

## What should I do if I'm bitten by an animal or exposed to its saliva?

Immediately wash the area thoroughly with soap and water and report to the nearest medical provider. ALL animal bites should be evaluated by a health care provider to assess risk of rabies exposure. A physician may order an injection of rabies immune globulin and a series of four or five injections of a rabies vaccine to the arm to prevent the disease.

## More information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) <http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/transmission/index.html>

World Health Organization (WHO) <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs099/en/>

USAPHC <http://phc.amedd.army.mil/rabies>

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