

FACT SHEET

Rabies

Rabies is a viral infection caused by a bite from an infected animal. Infection with rabies virus progresses rapidly to the central nervous system (brain and spinal cord). It is preventable but is almost always fatal if not treated. Most rabies cases that are reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) each year occur in wild animals. In the United States, distinct strains of rabies virus have been identified in raccoons, skunks, foxes, and coyotes. Several species of bats are also reservoirs for strains of the rabies virus. Once exposed by a bite or scratch, the virus reproduces quickly in the central nervous system and causes disease in the brain and ultimately death.

<http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/index.html>

- Cause:** Rabies is caused by a virus
- Symptoms:** The early symptoms of rabies in people are similar to that of many other illnesses, including fever, headache, and general weakness or discomfort. As the disease progresses, more specific symptoms appear and may include insomnia, anxiety, confusion, slight or partial paralysis, excitation, hallucinations, agitation, hyper salivation (increase in saliva), difficulty swallowing, and hydrophobia (fear of water). Death usually occurs within days of the onset of these symptoms.
- Spread:** The rabies virus is transmitted through saliva or brain/nervous system tissue. Persons only get rabies by coming in contact with these specific bodily excretions and tissues.
- Incubation:** In humans it varies and depends on how severe the wound is, where the wound is located in relation to nerve supply and how far it is from the brain. Incubation periods can be from 3-8 weeks but ranges from days to years.
- Risk Groups:** Persons exposed to wild animals or domestic animals that appear ill and may be infected with the virus, veterinarians and veterinary technicians, wildlife researchers, animal control staff, cavers, rehab kennel staff, laboratory and field personnel working with rabies virus or other lyssaviruses and travelers to endemic areas.
- Treatment and Prevention:** Clean and wash the wound immediately with soap/detergent and water then apply 70% ethanol (rubbing alcohol) tincture or aqueous solution of iodine or povidone iodine. It is an urgency not an emergency to seek medical attention. Post exposure prophylaxis treatment will be determined by the medical provider and consists of rabies

immunoglobulin and 4 or 5 vaccines given on specific days (0, 3, 7, 14 and if immunocompromised day 28).