



# Central Michigan District Health Department

*Promoting Healthy Families, Healthy Communities*



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## Rabies

### **What is Rabies?**

Rabies is a viral disease that attacks the central nervous system causing disease in the brain and death. Rabies is most often passed from animal to animal, or animal to human. It is spread to humans by the saliva of an infected animal. In Michigan, bats and skunks are the animals most frequently testing positive for rabies.

### **What are the symptoms of Rabies?**

In humans, it can take as little as a few days, several weeks, or as long as a year or more for the symptoms to appear. The first symptoms of rabies may be similar to the flu, including weakness or discomfort, fever, or headache. There also may be discomfort, prickling, or an itching sensation at the site of the bite. These symptoms may last for days.

### **How do humans get Rabies?**

Rabies is spread through the saliva of rabies-infected wild or domestic animals. When a person is bitten, or receives a lick to an open scratch, wound or mucous membrane, the virus can enter the body. Rabies is not spread by just petting an animal. Humans don't get rabies from other humans. Human rabies is a fatal disease.

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

Many animals infected with the rabies virus will not show visible signs of disease. The best way to identify animals that pose a risk is to recognize abnormal behavior. There are common characteristics to look for: rabid animals (wild or domestic) may stagger, appear restless, be aggressive, change the tone of their barks or growls or appear to be choking. Wild animals sometimes lose their fear of humans and act friendly. Don't think rabid animals can easily be spotted because they always drool excessively and foam at the mouth. In fact, most will display these symptoms only in the latter stages of infection, or not at all.

### **How is rabies treated?**

Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) treatment is carried out after a bite or exposure from a suspected rabid animal. In the United States, PEP consists of a regimen of one dose of immune globulin and four doses of rabies vaccine over a 14-day period. In addition to post-exposure treatment, effective pre-exposure vaccinations are available to people who may be at high risk of exposure to rabies. This group includes veterinarians, animal control workers, and zoo workers. Human pre-exposure vaccination against rabies requires only 2 doses given over 7 days.

*Please visit us at our website [www.cmdhd.org](http://www.cmdhd.org)*

### **How do I protect myself from Rabies?**

The best control measure to prevent rabies in humans is the vaccination of domestic animals, especially cats and dogs. Other prevention steps are:

- Avoid petting any unfamiliar animals.
- As a pet owner, ensure your pet is vaccinated, and, if “excitable,” is confined to a pen or on a leash when children and other visitors are nearby.
- Do not pick up an injured animal.
- Report any stray animals or animal bites to your local animal control office.
- Be aware that safe and effective vaccinations are available for humans exposed to rabies.
- Finally, teach your children to stay away from unfamiliar animals and make sure they tell you immediately if they are bit or scratched by an animal.

### **What should I do if I’ve been bit or scratched by a potentially rabid animal?**

First, wash the affected area with soap and water. Then contact your doctor or seek treatment at a medical facility. The medical personnel will notify the local health department, and the county animal control office. If the owner of the animal is known, contact them immediately to verify vaccination (shot) records. Whether the vaccination status is known or unknown, the animal will need to be quarantined and observed for ten days. **Do not attempt to shoot the animal, especially in the head, as this is the body part needed to test for rabies.**

If the animal is unable to be quarantined or tested, then PEP may be indicated.

### **What should I do if I awake from sleeping and find a bat in my room?**

Contact your local health department. If the bat can be obtained, the bat can be sent to the State of Michigan Lab for rabies testing. Based on the results of the test, PEP may or may not be recommended.