

# Rabies

## FACT SHEET



Washtenaw County  
Health Department

### What is Rabies?

Rabies is a viral disease that is usually transmitted from animal to animal, but can also infect humans as a result of an animal bite. Animal bites should always be reviewed carefully to determine if the animal may have rabies. Prompt treatment of the person can prevent the development of rabies, but if symptoms of rabies develop, it is always fatal.

### What are the symptoms?

It may take several weeks (usually 2-8 weeks), months, or up to one year to get sick after exposure.

#### Early symptoms

- Fever, headaches, fatigue, general anxiety or worry.
- Pain, tingling or numbness at the site of the bite.

#### Later symptoms

Trouble swallowing, paralysis, seizure, coma and eventual death (100% fatal).

### How is it spread?

The rabies virus is found in the saliva of infected animals. The virus is spread through a bite or scratch from an infected animal or through contact with intact mucous membranes. Animals most affected are wild animals such as: **skunks, raccoons, foxes, wolves, coyotes and bats**. Domestic animals (usually **unvaccinated cats, dogs and horses**) can also spread the virus.

*Animals not considered likely to carry Rabies virus:*

Chipmunks	Gophers	Prairie dogs	Squirrels
Gerbils	Moles	Rabbits	Voles
Hamsters	Mice	Rats	
Guinea pigs	Muskrats	Shrews	

### How is it controlled?

- Make sure your pets are vaccinated against rabies. This includes cats, dogs, ferrets, and horses.
- Do not handle stray or wild animals; call local animal management experts to help.

### How is it prevented?

Clean the bite or scratch wound immediately with soap and warm water; this is the most effective prevention against rabies. Call your health care provider and follow his/her advice. A series of four rabies shots, a single dose of immune globulin, a tetanus booster and/or treatment for infection may be needed. When calling, be sure to tell your health care provider the following:

- The kind of animal (wild or domestic). Wild animal bites are always of more concern than domestic pets.
- Was the skin broken from the bite? Was there bleeding from the wound?
- Rabies vaccine status of the biting animal.

### Animal Bite & Rabies Risk Management

Call your local animal control office or animal management company to assist in capture of the animal if necessary.

#### Domestic pets

Confine pet away from other animals and people for 10 days under guidance by Washtenaw County Health Department (WCHD) staff.

#### Wild/Stray Animals

- Wild or stray animals involved in a bite situation will require guidance by the WCHD staff to determine if rabies testing is necessary.
- All animals that require testing will be humanely euthanized and brain tissue sent for immediate testing.
- If a wild animal has bitten a pet, call your veterinarian and follow his/her advice.

#### Bats

- **DO NOT LET THE BAT GO if one is found inside your home.**
- Collect the bat if you can do so safely or call an animal management company.
- To safely collect bat, wear leather gloves and use a small container or box to hold bat, taping it closed once bat is inside. Please keep bat in a cool environment.
- Call WCHD at 734-544-6700 to determine if there is a need for rabies testing of the bat.

*This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).*