

Minnesota's Rabies Facts

What is rabies?

Rabies is a fatal neurologic disease caused by a virus. It is spread through saliva so a rabid animal must bite another animal or human in order to spread the virus. Though there is no cure after symptoms of the disease appear, a series of shots after exposure to the saliva of a rabid animal will prevent rabies.

Which animals carry rabies in Minnesota?

Skunks and bats are the wild animals that carry rabies in Minnesota. Dogs, cats, horses, cattle, and other domestic animals usually become infected after being bitten by a rabid skunk. People are generally exposed to rabies by bats, dogs, cats or livestock.

Animals that are **NOT** a rabies risk in Minnesota: hamsters, guinea pigs, gerbils, rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks, rats and mice.

What do I need to know about bats and rabies?

In recent years, most human cases of rabies in the U.S. have been due to bat bites that were not recognized or reported. Bats are a special problem because their tiny teeth marks are difficult to see and the bite may not be noticed.

If there is any chance that someone had physical contact with a bat, the bat should be captured and tested for rabies. These situations include finding a bat in the room of an unattended child, or waking up to find a bat in the bedroom.

How do I properly catch a bat for rabies testing?

- Find a container with a lid. Do not use pillowcases, blankets, or towels, as bats may bite through the fabric.
- Wear leather gloves.
- Approach the bat slowly and place the container over the bat. Then slide the cover underneath and flip the container over, trapping the bat inside.
- Secure the lid with tape.
- Submit the bat to the University of Minnesota Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory for rabies testing
 - Contact a local veterinary clinic to arrange shipment
 - Or, deliver the bat in person to:
Minnesota Veterinary Diagnostic Lab
1333 Gortner Ave
St. Paul, MN 55108
Phone: 1-800-605-8787; 612-625-8787
- In some Minnesota communities, an animal control officer is available to help capture a bat and get it tested for rabies.

What should I do if someone is bitten by an animal?

- Wash the bite immediately with soap and water. Thorough cleaning is the most effective way to prevent infections after animal bites.
- Visit your doctor so they can assess the need for rabies prevention. Other infections, such as tetanus, may also result from a bite wound and require medical attention.
- Get the pet owner's name, address, and telephone number, and the rabies vaccination status of the animal. Contact animal control or your local police/sheriff's department.
- In most cases, a dog, cat, or ferret that bites a person is confined and observed for 10 days. If it becomes ill during the 10 days, a veterinarian should be consulted immediately.
- Wild animals that bite people (skunks, foxes, coyotes, raccoons and other wild carnivores)



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should be euthanized and tested for rabies if they can be captured. The incubation period for rabies in wild animals is unknown; because of this, there is no observation period. If your community has an animal control officer, contact them for assistance in capturing the animal for testing. ***Call the Minnesota Department of Health at 651-201-5414 for advice about bat contact or animal bites.***

What should I do if a wild animal bites my pet?

Contact your veterinarian or the Minnesota Board of Animal Health at 651-201-6808 if a wild animal bites your pet. If your community has an animal control officer, contact them for assistance in capturing the animal for rabies testing.

How can rabies be prevented?

- Be sure to vaccinate your pets (dogs, cats, ferrets) against rabies and keep them current. Vaccinated pets prevent the spread of disease between wildlife and people.
- Vaccination is also available for horses, cattle and sheep.
- Teach children not to approach an unfamiliar or wild animal and encourage them to tell an adult if they are bitten.
- Never leave infants or young children alone with any animal.
- Report stray dogs and cats or animals showing unusual behavior to your local animal control office.
- Don't attract wild animals to your home or yard. Tightly cover garbage cans and bat-proof your home.
- Don't feed, approach, touch or adopt wild animals. Don't keep wild animals as pets.
- Hunters and trappers should avoid animals with abnormal behavior or animals found dead. Wear gloves while processing game, and cook all meat thoroughly.
- Fair and petting zoo animals that come into contact with the public should be vaccinated. Rabies vaccine is also recommended for horses and valuable livestock.
- When traveling, especially outside the U.S., avoid contact with dogs and cats even if they appear friendly.

What is Rabies Post Exposure Treatment, or PEP?

If your doctor, in consultation with the Minnesota Department of Health, believes you had an exposure to the rabies virus, they will recommend you get PEP.

PEP consists of 1 injection of human rabies immune globulin (HRIG) and 4 rabies vaccinations. These shots are usually given in the arm.

The first day of rabies treatment is referred to as day 0. On day 0, HRIG and the first vaccination is given. Three more vaccinations are given on days 3, 7, and 14.