

Rabies

What is rabies?

Rabies is a nervous system disease caused by a virus. If left untreated, the disease is fatal. The virus is spread through the saliva of an infected animal, which must bite another animal or human to spread the virus.

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 United States have been due to bat bites. Bats are a special problem because 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.

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

- Wash the bite immediately with soap and water.
- Visit your doctor so they can assess the need for rabies prevention, tetanus boosters or antibiotics.
- Get the pet owner's name, telephone number, and the rabies vaccination status of the animal. In most cases, a dog, cat, or ferret that bites a person is confined and observed for 10 days.
- Wild animals that bite people should be euthanized and tested for rabies if they can be captured.
- 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?

Call your veterinarian, or the Minnesota Board of Animal Health at 651-201-6808. 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 against rabies. Vaccination is also available for horses, cattle and sheep. Vaccinated pets prevent the spread of disease between wildlife and people.

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- 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.
- Don't keep wild animals as pets.
- Avoid animals behaving abnormally.

What is Rabies Post Exposure Treatment, or PEP?

If you were exposed to rabies, PEP will be recommended. This consists of 1 injection of human rabies immune globulin (HRIG) and four rabies vaccinations on days 0, 3, 7, and 14. These are usually given in the arm.

Minnesota Department of Health
Zoonotic Diseases Unit
651-201-5414

*To obtain this information
in a different format, call:*
651-201-5414