

Public Health Fact Sheet

Rabies

Adapted from fact sheets developed by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment and the Centers for Disease Control.

What is Rabies?

Rabies is a disease of the nervous system caused by a virus. It results from an exposure to the saliva of an animal infected with rabies. Rabies is a fatal disease.

Who gets Rabies?

In the United States, rabies among humans is rare although anyone can get it after an exposure to a rabid animal. It is spread when the virus in an animal's saliva, or other infectious body fluid, enters an open cut, wound, mouth, or eyes.

What is an exposure to Rabies?

There are two types of exposures, a bite and non-bite. A bite is any puncture of the skin by teeth. A non-bite exposure occurs when saliva, brain tissue, or spinal fluid from an animal with rabies enters any scratch, abrasion, open wound, eyes, or mouth. The petting of a rabid animal is not considered an exposure.

What animals get Rabies?

Only mammals are infected with rabies, however, some mammals are more likely to be infected with rabies than others. For example, skunks, raccoons, bats, foxes and coyotes are more likely to be infected. Rodents, rabbits, and hares almost never get rabies.

How can you tell if an animal is Rabid?

Although some animals with rabies look and act normal most develop either the furious or dumb form of the disease. "Furious rabies" is when the infected animal is easily excited or angered. "Dumb rabies" is when the infected animal appears paralyzed or dazed. The only sure way to tell if an animal has rabies is to kill it and test the brain for the rabies virus.

How long can animals spread Rabies?

Cats and dogs can spread rabies for 3-5 days before they become ill and during their illness. The amount of time varies for other animals.

What should you do if you are exposed to a rabid animal?

Immediately wash all bite wounds and scratches thoroughly with soap and water. See a doctor as soon as possible. After an exposure to a proven or suspected rabid animal, rabies shots must be started.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not intended for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation. If you have any questions about the disease described above or think that you may have an infection, consult with your healthcare provider. This fact sheet is based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's topic fact sheets.

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How can Rabies be prevented?

Vaccination of dogs and cats against rabies is the best way to reduce human exposure. Avoid contact with wild animals and do not keep wild animals as pets. Control of stray animals can decrease both animal and human exposures to rabies. Animals which have contact with an animal that may have rabies should be reported to the local animal control agency.

Where can you get more information?

- Your Local Health Department - Two Rivers Public Health Department at 888-669-7154
- Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Epidemiology at (402) 471-2937
- <http://www.cdc.gov/health/default.htm>
- Your doctor, nurse, or local health center

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