

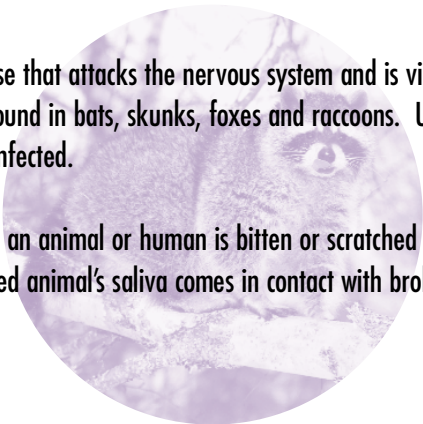
RABIES

Beware of Rabies. Be Aware of Rabies.



RABIES

What is it?



Rabies is a viral disease that attacks the nervous system and is virtually always fatal. It is most commonly found in bats, skunks, foxes and raccoons. Unvaccinated pets or livestock can also be infected.

Rabies is spread when an animal or human is bitten or scratched by an infected animal, or if an infected animal's saliva comes in contact with broken skin or mucous membranes.

PREVENTING RABIES EXPOSURE

What is Exposure?

Exposure is defined by national authorities as either: 1) bite exposure — any penetration of the skin by teeth, or 2) non-bite exposure — saliva of an infected animal coming in contact with abrasions, open wounds, or mucous membranes. Theoretically, scratches contaminated with saliva or other potentially infectious tissue are also classified as non-bite exposure.

PREVENTING EXPOSURE

Because the majority of rabies cases in people in the United States are contracted from wild animals, people should avoid contact with them — especially bats, skunks, and raccoons. Some simple steps can be taken to make your home less appealing to wild animals.

- Never approach or touch wild or stray animals or pets that you don't know well.
- Do not encourage any wild animal to live in your neighborhood by making pet food, garbage or handouts available to them.
- Install a chimney cap to prevent raccoons and other animals from living in your home.
- Seal areas around your home that animals may use as a den, such as an attic, crawl space, or areas under your porch or deck.

SIGNS OF RABIES IN ANIMALS

It is not always possible to determine that an animal is infected with rabies by simple observation. Signs in an animal which should lead you to suspect that it may be rabid are:

- Nervousness
- Aggressiveness
- Excessive drooling and foaming at the mouth
- Abnormal behavior such as:
 - wild animals losing their fear of human beings
 - animals normally active at night being seen during the day.

RABIES IN BATS

Since 1980, the majority of cases of human rabies diagnosed in the United States have been associated with bat rabies virus. The most frequently found rabid animal in Michigan is the bat. People normally know when they have been bitten by a bat. However, bats have small teeth that may not leave easily identifiable marks.

Recently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued recommendations for post-exposure treatment in which there is reasonable probability that contact with a bat could have occurred and rabies cannot be ruled out through prompt testing of the bat. If you find a bat in the room of:

- 1) a sleeping person
- 2) an unattended child
- 3) someone mentally or physically challenged
- 4) an intoxicated individual

you should save the bat for testing and seek medical attention immediately. Call your local animal control officer to capture the animal or for advice on how to capture the animal. If professional help is unavailable, use precautions to capture the bat safely — wear leather gloves and when the bat lands, approach it slowly. Place a box or coffee can over the bat. Punch holes in a piece of cardboard to allow the bat to breathe, and slide it under the container to trap the bat inside. Tape the cardboard to the container to secure it. Contact your local health department or animal control authority to arrange for rabies testing.

RABIES IN RACCOONS

In recent years, an outbreak of raccoon rabies occurred in the east and has now spread into Ohio. In 1997, there were 62 cases of raccoon rabies reported in Ohio animals. Wildlife experts expect that raccoon rabies will eventually enter Michigan. With raccoon populations in both Michigan and Ohio at high levels, extra care must be taken to avoid animals that could be infected.

It is illegal to bring raccoons or skunks into Michigan from other states.* Even if you think you are saving the life of a raccoon, do not capture and release it.

* In other states, people have moved infected raccoons that looked healthy, thus spreading raccoon rabies into new areas.

PROTECTING YOUR PETS

What can be done now? You can begin by getting all your dogs, cats and ferrets vaccinated against rabies. Even indoor cats can get rabies. Keep their vaccination up to date.

Prevent your pets from coming into contact with wildlife. If you think your pet or livestock have been exposed to rabies, you should report that to the Michigan Department of Agriculture. Consult your veterinarian about vaccination of sheep, cattle and horses. In general, any pet or livestock possibly exposed to rabies should be reported to your veterinarian.

WHAT TO DO IF BITTEN OR SCRATCHED BY AN ANIMAL

- Immediately wash the wound with lots of soap and water.
- Capture the animal, if possible, so it can be checked for rabies. Take care to prevent additional bites, or get the pet owner's name, address, and telephone number. Find out if the animal has a current rabies vaccination and write down the rabies tag and license number.
- If an animal must be killed, do not damage the head. Rabies testing is done on the brain.
- When dealing with a dead animal, wear gloves or use a shovel to move the animal. Put the animal's body in a heavy-duty plastic bag and place in a protected area away from people and other animals. If necessary, a dead animal may be kept overnight on ice or in a refrigerator until it can be picked up for testing. Do not freeze. Clean the area and any tools used to remove the animal with one part bleach to 10 parts water.
- Do not delay seeking medical advice. Go to your family doctor or the nearest emergency room. Also, call your local health department right away. Some people are afraid to seek treatment because they have heard it involves a series of painful shots to the abdomen. This is no longer true.

WHERE CAN I FIND HELP?

Knowing the facts about rabies can help halt the spread of the disease in Michigan in both animals and humans. Make sure all your family members know how to avoid the virus and what to do if exposed. Spreading information can help stop the spread of rabies.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT RABIES

- Family physician
- Your veterinarian
- Local health department
- Animal shelters
- Michigan Department of Community Health,
Community Public Health Administration,
Bureau of Epidemiology



John Engler, Governor

James K. Haveman, Jr., Director

Michigan Department of Natural Resources
Michigan Department of Agriculture

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Skunk photo courtesy of David Kenyon

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