

Rabies Facts

What is rabies?

Rabies is a deadly viral infection that can infect humans and animals. It is nearly 100% fatal if not treated prior to the onset of symptoms.

Who can get rabies?

Any human or mammal, including bats, skunks, raccoons, foxes, coyotes, cats, dogs, and farm animals can become infected with the rabies virus.

How is rabies spread?

The rabies virus is spread through the saliva of an infected animal. Humans and animals can get rabies when bitten by a rabid animal or when saliva or neurologic tissue from a rabid animal enters the eyes, mouth, nose, or a break in the skin. Handling of a rabid bat can lead to rabies infection, even when no noticeable bite wound occurs.

Human to human transmission of rabies is extremely rare, but possible if the saliva or neurologic tissue of an infected person comes into contact with the eyes, mouth, nose, genitals, or a break in the skin of an uninfected person.

How can I protect myself from rabies?

You can protect yourself from rabies by avoiding contact with animals that have or are suspected of having rabies. Do not handle bats or other wildlife. In the event that you suspect an animal might have rabies, please contact Contra Costa Animal Services (<http://www.co.contra-costa.ca.us/index.aspx?nid=59>) at 925-335-8300.

Domestic animals can transmit rabies between wildlife and humans. Preventive rabies vaccination of dogs is required for dog licensing in Contra Costa County. For cats and other domestic animals, rabies vaccine is strongly recommended. Low-cost rabies vaccinations for dogs and cats are available through Contra Costa Animal Services (<http://www.co.contra-costa.ca.us/index.aspx?nid=59>) at 925-335-8300.

What should I do if I think I have been exposed to rabies?

Humans who are bitten by a wild or domestic animal should wash the wounds thoroughly, seek immediate medical attention, contact Contra Costa Animal Services (<http://www.co.contra-costa.ca.us/index.aspx?nid=59>) at 925-335-8300 and contact Contra Costa Public Health (/cd/) at 925-313-6740. If determined necessary by a healthcare provider, vaccines (given in the arm) and human rabies immunoglobulin are administered to prevent the onset of rabies in exposed persons.

Humans who have touched, or been touched by, a bat—or for whom direct physical contact cannot be ruled out (e.g. a small child or disabled person found in the presence of a bat), should wash any wounds or recognized points of contact thoroughly with soap and water. If the bat is available for collection and rabies testing, they should contact Contra Costa Animal Services (<http://www.co.contra-costa.ca.us/index.aspx?nid=59>) at 925-335-8300. If not, they should seek immediate medical attention and contact Contra Costa Public Health (/cd/) at 925-313-6740.

What should I do if I think my pet has been exposed to rabies?

If a domestic animal is bitten by another animal, or found in the presence of a bat, its owner should contact Contra Costa Animal Services (<http://www.co.contra-costa.ca.us/index.aspx?nid=59>) at 925-335-8300, and have any injuries evaluated by a veterinarian.

What are the symptoms of rabies?

A rabid animal may have symptoms such as:

- Behavior changes, including depression and aggression

- In wildlife, loss of fear of humans or disruption of normal day/night cycle (e.g. a nocturnal animal active in the daytime)
- Gait/postural changes
- Decreased appetite
- Excessive salivation

Days, weeks, or months after an untreated rabies exposure, humans may develop symptoms such as:

- Irritation, prickling or itching sensations at the site of the bite
- Fever, headache
- Confusion, anxiety, stress and tension
- Impaired swallowing

In both humans and animals, symptoms of rabies nearly always proceed quickly to death. No reliable treatment is available for humans or animals after rabies symptoms appear.