



# Indiana State Department of Health

## Epidemiology Resource Center

### Quick Facts

#### **About...Rabies**

##### **What is rabies?**

Rabies is a viral disease that infects the brain and spinal cord of mammals, including humans. It is almost always fatal.

##### **How is rabies spread?**

Rabies is spread by the bite of a rabid animal. Rabies virus may change animal behavior so they are more likely to bite. Rabies may also be spread when saliva comes in contact with an open wound or the eyes.

##### **Which animals can spread rabies?**

Indiana animals that may spread rabies to humans are bats, skunks, foxes, and raccoons. Bats are the most likely to have rabies. Dogs and cats can also spread rabies, but this seldom happens in Indiana.

##### **What are the symptoms of rabies in animals?**

One of the first signs of rabies in animals is a change in behavior. Rabid wild animals can lose their fear of humans, and nocturnal (active at night) animals might be seen during daylight hours. Some animals may have trouble walking or have a "dull" or "vacant" look.

##### **What are the symptoms of rabies in humans?**

The first symptoms of rabies may be very similar to those of the flu including general weakness or discomfort, fever, or headache. There may also be a prickling or itching sensation at the site of bite. If left untreated, the disease progresses to more serious neurological symptoms. The disease is nearly always fatal.

## **Who is at risk for rabies?**

Anyone who has had been bitten by a rabid animal, bats, or animals acting abnormally, may be at risk.

## **How can rabies be treated?**

Rabies cannot be cured and is almost always fatal. Efforts are focused to prevent exposure or provide vaccines that will prevent disease.

## **How is rabies prevented?**

You can avoid getting rabies by:

- Avoiding animals you don't know or those that are wild, sleeping, injured, eating, or caring for young
- Preventing wildlife from entering your house, garage, storage sheds, or other areas
- Keeping food and garbage out or insecure where it will attract wildlife
- Ensuring your pet is up-to-date on rabies shots.

## **What should I do if an animal bites me?**

If an animal bites you, there are a few simple steps you can take:

- Wash the wound with soap and running water and go to a doctor or emergency room if the bite is severe or bleeding
- Report the bite to your local health department or animal control agency. The animal may need to be captured for testing or quarantine before you are treated.

## **Can rabies disease be prevented?**

If you are exposed to rabies, the disease can be prevented with shots before signs develop. Correct treatment can prevent rabies. People who are in high-risk jobs (e.g. work with wild animals) should get rabies vaccine.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to your local health department or veterinarian.

For additional information on rabies, go to:

<http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/>

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