



RABIES INFORMATION & PREVENTION

A PUBLIC HEALTH MESSAGE FROM THE
PHILADELPHIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

What is rabies?

Rabies is a deadly but preventable virus that is spread primarily after the bite of an infected mammal. In the United States, the virus is mainly found in wild animals such as bats, raccoons, groundhogs, foxes, and skunks, but has been found in some domestic animals or pets such as dogs, cats, and ferrets. Squirrels, rats, mice, hamsters, guinea pigs, gerbils, chipmunks, and rabbits almost never have rabies. The first symptoms of rabies infection in humans are usually general and tend to increase in severity as the infection spreads to the brain. Early symptoms include irritability, headache, fever and sometimes itching or tingling pain at the site of exposure. Only a few human cases are reported in the United States each year.

How humans get rabies

Rabies is found in infected mammals' saliva. When the sick animal bites another animal or human, the virus can be passed through broken skin. It is possible but very rare for people to get rabies if an infected animal's saliva gets directly into their eyes, nose, mouth, or an open wound.



HOW TO PREVENT RABIES

Vaccination

The best protection against rabies is to vaccinate your pet dogs and cats.

- In Philadelphia, all cats and dogs **over 3 months** of age must be vaccinated for rabies
- If the first vaccination was given before one year of age then dogs and cats must be vaccinated again one year later
- After the first vaccine, dogs and cats must be vaccinated either annually or triennially depending on vaccine label instructions

Protect Yourself from Animal Bites

Household Pets

- Evaluate what type of pet is appropriate for your household
- Do not play roughly with domesticated animals
- Make sure that children are supervised around animals in your household
- Consider training pets to be around other people
- Do not approach or disturb sleeping or eating animals
- If approached by an aggressive dog, don't scream and/or run, try to remain still and avoid eye contact



Wild or Stray Animals

- You should not try to approach, pet, or capture stray or wild animals
- If you see a stray dog or cat call the Philadelphia Animal Care and Control Team (ACCT) at (267) 385-3800 or the PA Game Commission at 1-800-228-0791 so they can try to catch the animal
- If you see sick, injured or aggressive wildlife you should contact ACCT. Animal Control Officers will try to catch or trap the animal. Your help may be needed to safely trap an animal, such as letting a trap to be left on your property.
- Make sure to seal cracks and gaps in your home so that bats cannot come in. If bats are entering your home through gaps and cracks, you should contact a licensed wildlife pest control company. They will repair the gaps and cracks, preventing bats from gaining entry. If you observe a bat in your home you should contact ACCT so they can come out and attempt to remove the bat.

What to do if bitten by a...

Wild Animal

- Capture the animal, if possible, so it can be tested. ACCT should be called to assist. Take care to prevent additional bites or damage to the animal's head.
- Immediately wash the wound with lots of soap and running water.
- Get medical attention. Go to your family doctor or the nearest emergency room. The doctor and hospital are required in Philadelphia to report the animal bite to the Health Department, preferably by calling (215) 685-6748 with the information about the animal and how the bite happened.
- If you are not sure whether or not you have been bitten you should also seek medical attention or contact the Health Department. This situation may occur if you have been exposed to a bat. The Health Department will test any bat that has bitten you, or any bat that was present in a room where people were asleep or unconscious (because you often cannot feel a bat bite you or see the marks from a bite), or if that bat was in a room with a child or someone who is mentally/physically disabled or intoxicated.

Pet Dog, Cat, or Ferret

- Obtain the pet owner's name, address, telephone number. Find out if the animal has a current rabies vaccination and write down the rabies tag number.
- Immediately wash the wound with lots of soap and running water.
- Get medical attention. Go to your family doctor or the nearest emergency room. The doctor and hospital are required in Philadelphia to report the animal bite to the Health Department, preferably by telephoning (215) 685-6748 with the information about the pet, its owner and circumstances of the bite. A bite victim may also report the bite by calling the above telephone number.
- Rabies treatment depends on the health of an animal 10 days after the exposure.
 - If the pet dog, cat, or ferret is *healthy and alive* 10 days after the incident, the person scratched/bitten *does not* need rabies vaccine.
 - When the pet's address is known and not the same as the victim, the Health Department will check if the pet is healthy after 10 days.



If you are bit, have this information ready:

- Type and description of animal.
- If it is a pet, who owns it, and where it lives.
- How the bite occurred.
- Whether the animal has been seen in the area before and what direction it was traveling.
- How it behaved.

Treatment for those exposed to rabies

If you have had contact with a potentially rabid animal, there is a series of four vaccinations as well as an initial dose of rabies immune globulin known as post-exposure-prophylaxis that is extremely effective at preventing rabies infection if given properly.

For more information:

- Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH): www.phila.gov/health
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/rabies
- Bite Report (PDPH Division of Disease Control): (215) 685-6748
- Animal Care & Control Team (ACCT): (267) 385-3800
- Rabies Information (PDPH Division of Disease Control): (215) 685-6742