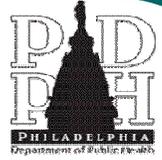


Rabies

Frequently Asked Questions



What is rabies?

Rabies is a deadly but preventable virus that is spread primarily by the bite of an infected animal. In the U.S. the virus is mainly found in wild animals such as bats, coyotes, foxes, raccoons, groundhogs, & skunks but has also been found in some domestic animals such as dogs, cats, and ferrets. Small mammals- squirrels, rats, mice, hamsters, guinea pigs, gerbils, chipmunks, & rabbits are almost never found to be infected with rabies.

What are the symptoms?

Initial symptoms of rabies infection in humans are usually vague & tend to increase in severity as the infection spreads to the brain. Neurological symptoms such as confusion, agitation, hallucinations, delirium, & insomnia may present as the virus spreads to the brain. Once symptoms begin, survival is rare. Deaths that occur in the U.S are usually the result of people not knowing that they are infected with the virus & as a result treatment was never started.

How does it spread?

Rabies virus 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 rare for people to get rabies if an infected animal's saliva gets directly into their eyes, nose, mouth, or an open wound. Rabies is not spread person to person. Touching a person with rabies or other casual contact with non-infectious urine, blood, or feces does not result in rabies.

Who is at risk of developing rabies?

Anyone can be at risk for rabies infection. However if you work with animals, work in a laboratory that tests for rabies, or are traveling to a country where rabies is more common the likelihood of exposure is greater. People at high risk for rabies can get pre-exposure vaccination before they are placed in high-risk situations.

What is the 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 rabies post-exposure-prophylaxis (PEP) that is extremely effective at preventing rabies infection if properly administered. A fifth dose of vaccine may be required for those who are immunocompromised.

What should I do if I think I have it?

If you have been bitten by a stray/wild animal or have been exposed to other infectious material (e.g. brain matter) you should seek medical evaluation as soon as possible. In addition you should also notify the Division of Disease Control (DDC) of the incident by calling 215-685-6748.

How is it prevented?

Make sure that your pets are up to date on the rabies vaccine. Pets should also be confined & supervised while outside so they will not come into contact with any wild animals. You should not try to approach, pet, or capture stray or wild animals. If you see a stray animal or if a stray animal has bitten you, contact animal control professionals so they can come out to trap the animal. To prevent exposures to bats, make sure that you seal cracks & gaps in your home so that bats cannot enter. If a bat enters your home contact your local animal control professionals to have it removed.

For more information contact your doctor, refer to <http://www.phila.gov/Health/> or contact the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, Division of Disease Control at 215-685-6740.

