

What is rabies?

Rabies is a deadly but preventable virus that is primarily spread through a bite or scratch from 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 and cats (including stray and feral). Small rodents including rats, mice, squirrels, guinea pigs and hamsters almost never have rabies. The first symptoms of rabies infections in humans are usually general and increase in severity as the infection spreads to the brain. This may look like fever and flu-like symptoms progressing to confusion, agitation, abnormal behavior, hallucinations and hydrophobia. Once symptoms begin, survival is rare. Only a few human cases are reported in the United States each year.

How humans get rabies

Rabies is found in infected mammal's saliva. When a sick animal bites or scratches another animal or human, the virus can be transmitted through broken skin. It is also possible for rabies to be transmitted when infected saliva comes into contact with open wounds or mucous membranes including the eyes, mouth and nose.

⇒ Note: Since bat bites can be easy to miss, bat exposures include the following scenarios: feeling or seeing a bat, being asleep or unconscious in a room with a bat, or a child, mentally/physically disabled adult or intoxicated person being in a room with a bat.

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 1 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 pets.
- Supervise children around animals.
- Consider training pets to be around other people.
- Do not approach or disturb sleeping or eating animals.
- If approached by an aggressive dog, do not 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.
- Call the Philadelphia Animal Care and Control Team (ACCT) at (267) 385-3800. As the region's largest animal care and control service provider, they will respond to a raccoon, bat or other wildlife complaint if the animal is in a common area of a home (not in walls, attic or crawl space), or if the animal appears sick, injured, or has wounds.
- ACCT responds to reports of stray dogs, but cannot respond to reports of stray cats, unless sick, injured, or has wounds, and recommends exhausting all options before bringing either into the shelter due to limited capacity.
- If bats are entering your home through gaps and cracks, you should contact a licensed wildlife pest control company to assess and seal off entry points.

Community Cats

- Connect with Trap-Neuter-Release groups (TNR) who can assist with vaccination and spay/neutering <https://acctphilly.org/community-cats/>.
- If you see a sick, injured, or aggressive community cat, call ACCT at (267) 385-3800 for guidance.
- To maintain a nuisance free colony, adhere to a feeding schedule in a secure and clean area, build and regularly clean an outdoor litterbox, use physical barriers and deterrents to keep cats away from specific areas.




Treatment for those exposed to rabies

For exposures involving pets, rabies treatment depends on the health of the animal 10 days after the exposure. If the pet is healthy and alive 10 days after the incident, the person exposed *does not* need rabies vaccine. The Health Department will check with the pet owner to see if the pet is healthy after 10 days.

If you had an exposure from an animal that may be rabid, you should get post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), a series of four vaccinations and an initial dose of rabies immune globulin as soon as possible. The series is effective at preventing rabies and should be administered when:

- The Animal's location is unknown/uncertain.
- The animal tests positive for rabies
- Dogs, cats or ferrets are NOT observed healthy after 10 days or NOT rabies tested.

Most local emergency departments have the rabies vaccine and immune globulin. If you do not have insurance or having difficulty getting this treatment, call (215) 685-6741.

| Type of Animal | Exposure | First Steps | Who to Contact | When to get PEP |
|--|--|--|---|---|
|  <p>Wild Animals (bats, raccoons, skunks, foxes, groundhogs)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bites, scratches, open wound or mucous membrane contact with animal saliva or brain material • Asleep or unconscious in room with bat • Child, mentally/physically disabled adult or intoxicated person in room with bat | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wash wound with soap and running water • Get medical attention | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animal Control (ACCT) if animal is visibly sick, on property, or in common area of home (not in walls, attic or crawl space) and can be submitted for testing • Health Department for PEP guidance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animal is unable to be tested • Animal tests positive for rabies |
|  <p>Community Cats</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bites, scratches, open wound or mucous membrane contact with animal saliva or brain material | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wash wound with soap and running water • Get medical attention | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Department for PEP guidance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animal is unable to be tested • Animal tests positive for rabies |
|  <p>Pet dogs, cats and ferrets</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bites, scratches (cat or ferret), open wound or mucous membrane contact with animal saliva or brain material | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain pet owner's contact information and animal's current rabies vaccine date • Wash wound with soap and running water • Get medical attention | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Department for animal observation and PEP guidance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animal's location is unknown/unable to be observed healthy at 10 days • Animal tests positive for rabies |

If you are bitten, scratched or had another non-bite exposure, have this information ready: type and description of animal, details on the exposure and animal's behavior, information on the owner and location of animal OR where it was seen and direction it was traveling if unowned. This will help inform post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) recommendations.

For All Animal Exposures, Report Human Victim & Animal Information Including Location:
Telephone: (215) 685-6748

For more information:

- **Animal Exposure Report (PDPH Division of Disease Control):** (215) 685-6748, <https://www.phila.gov/services/mental-physical-health/report-a-health-or-safety-concern/report-an-animal-bite>
- **Rabies Information and PEP Guidance: (PDPH Division of Disease Control):** (215) 685-6741, <https://hip.phila.gov/disease-control/animal-bites/>
- **Animal Care and Control Team (ACCT):** (267) 385-3800, <http://www.acctphilly.org/>
- **Community Cats Guidance:** <http://www.acctphilly.org/community-cats/>
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:** www.cdc.gov/rabies
- **Dangerous Dog Complaints:** <https://acctphilly.org/dangerous-dogs/>