

Rabies

Your questions answered

What is rabies? Rabies is a preventable viral disease of mammals most often transmitted through the bite of a rabid animal. The rabies virus infects the central nervous system, causing encephalopathy and ultimately death.

What are its symptoms? Early symptoms of rabies in humans are nonspecific, consisting of fever, headache and general malaise. As the disease progresses, neurological symptoms appear and may include insomnia, anxiety, confusion, slight or partial paralysis, excitation, hallucinations, agitation, hypersalivation, difficulty swallowing and hydrophobia (fear of water). Death usually occurs within days of the onset of symptoms.

How is it spread? People and animals usually get rabies from the bite of a rabid animal. It is also possible, but quite rare, that people may get rabies if infectious material from a rabid animal, such as saliva, gets directly into their eyes, nose, mouth or a wound.

Who gets rabies? Only mammals are infected with rabies. However, some mammals are more likely to be infected with rabies than others. For example, skunks, raccoons, bats, foxes and coyotes are more likely to be infected. Rodents, rats and hares almost never get rabies. Animals, which can then transmit the disease to humans.

How is it diagnosed? Several tests are necessary to diagnose rabies in humans; no single test is sufficient. Tests are performed on samples of saliva, serum, spinal fluid and skin biopsies of hair follicles at the nape of the neck.

How is it treated? One of the most effective methods to decrease the chances for infection involves thorough washing of the wound with soap and water. Specific medical attention for someone exposed to rabies consists of a regimen of one dose of immune globulin and five doses of rabies vaccine over a 28-day period. Rabies immune globulin and the first dose of rabies vaccine should be given by your health care provider as soon as possible after exposure. Additional doses of rabies vaccine should be given on days 0, 3, 7 and 14 after the first vaccination. Current vaccines are relatively painless and are given in your arm, like a flu or tetanus vaccine.

What Can **YOU** Do?

Will the vaccine make me sick?

Adverse reactions to rabies vaccine and immune globulin are not common. Newer vaccines in use today cause fewer adverse reactions than previously available vaccines. Mild, local reactions to the rabies vaccine, such as pain, redness, swelling, or itching at the injection site, have been reported. Rarely, symptoms such as headache, nausea, abdominal pain, muscle aches and dizziness have been reported. Local pain and low-grade fever may follow injection of rabies immune globulin.

How can I can protect my pet from rabies?

First, visit your veterinarian with your pet on a regular basis and keep rabies vaccinations up-to-date for all cats, ferrets, and dogs. Second, maintain control of your pets by keeping cats and ferrets indoors and keeping dogs under direct supervision. Third, spay or neuter your pets to help reduce the number of unwanted pets that may not be properly cared for or vaccinated regularly. Lastly, call animal control to remove all stray animals from your neighborhood since these animals may be unvaccinated or ill.

What if a neighborhood dog or cat bites me?

You should seek medical evaluation for any animal bite. If the cat (or dog or ferret) appeared healthy at the time you were bitten, it can be confined by its owner for 10 days and observed. No anti-rabies prophylaxis is needed. No person in the United States has ever contracted rabies from a dog, cat or ferret held in quarantine for 10 days.

If a dog, cat, or ferret appeared ill at the time it bit you or becomes ill during the 10 day quarantine, it should be evaluated by a veterinarian for signs of rabies and you should seek medical advice about the need for anti-rabies prophylaxis.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not intended for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation. If you have any questions about the disease described above or think that you may have an infection, consult with your health-care provider. This fact sheet is based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Health and Safety topic fact sheets.

For more information on rabies, call the **Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department** at **(785) 843-0721**, (on the web at: www.ldchealth.org), call the **Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Office of Surveillance and Epidemiology** (877) 427-7317, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/> or contact your doctor, nurse or local health center.