

Fact Sheet: Rabies

What is Rabies?

Rabies is a preventable viral disease of mammals most often transmitted to humans through the bite of a rabid animal. If prompt treatment occurs after an animal bite then the disease can be prevented. If no treatment occurs, then the Rabies virus may infect the central nervous system, eventually causing disease in the brain and death.

Signs and Symptoms

It may take several weeks or even months to show symptoms of Rabies.

Early symptoms include:

- Fever
- Headache
- General weakness

Late symptoms include:

- Anxiety
- Confusion
- Partial paralysis
- Hallucinations
- Increase in saliva
- Difficulty swallowing

Treatment

Rabies post exposure vaccinations consists of a dose of human rabies immune globulin and four doses of rabies vaccine given on the day of the exposure, and then again on days 0, 3, 7, and 14.

Immunocompromised patients require an additional rabies vaccination on day 28. The vaccine is given in a muscle, usually in the upper arm. This set of vaccinations is highly effective at preventing rabies if given as soon as possible following an exposure. Your doctor and local health department will be able to guide you through the process.

How is it spread?

The rabies virus is found in the saliva of infected animals. The virus is spread through a bite or scratch from an infected animal. Animals most affected are wild animals such as: skunks, raccoons, foxes, coyotes and bats. Domestic animals (usually unvaccinated cats, dogs and horses) can also spread the virus.

Prevention

If you are bitten, clean the bite or scratch wound immediately with soap and warm water. Call your doctor and follow their advice. A series of four Rabies shots, a dose of Human Rabies Immune Globulin (HRIG), and treatment for infection may be needed. HRIG is administered based on patient weight and can result in multiple shots (20IU/Kg of body weight)

When you call your health care provider please be prepared to provide the following information:

- The type of animal (wild or domestic)
- Is the skin broken with bleeding?
- If the animal is domestic, have they had the Rabies vaccine?

The following precautions can help prevent Rabies:

- Make sure your pets are routinely vaccinated against rabies. This includes cats, dogs, horses and ferrets.
- Do not touch or allow your children to touch wild animals. Keep your distance!

If you find a bat in your home, do not throw it away. Call the Ingham county Health Department (517-887-4308) or the Ingham County animal control office (517-676-8370) for advice. You may also reference the “Bats in your home” fact sheet.

This fact sheet is for informational purposes and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care professional. For more information about communicable disease, speak to your health care provider or call the Ingham County Health Department at (517)-887-4308

Visit our website at <http://hd.ingham.org>

or the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at: www.cdc.gov

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