

# Rabies

## What is rabies?

Rabies is caused by a virus that people and other mammals can get when they are exposed to the **saliva** of an animal with rabies. Rabies is **not** spread through blood, urine or feces.

## Which animals carry rabies?

In the US raccoons are the animal most commonly found to have rabies, followed by skunks and bats. Any wild mammal can have rabies. Dogs, cats and ferrets that bite humans also need to be checked to see if they have rabies.

## How often do people get rabies?

In 2007, there were more than 7,000 cases of animal rabies reported in the United States. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that tens of thousands of people are successfully treated each year after being bitten by an animal that may have rabies. The CDC also reports that a few people die of rabies each year in the US, usually because they do not seek medical care quickly.

## How can I protect myself against rabies?

Rabies is 100% preventable. Protect yourself by being sure your pets are vaccinated and avoiding contact with wild animals.

- Stash your trash. Trash bags or pet food and water dishes left outside may attract wild animals.
- Leave the wild wild. Enjoy wild animals from a distance, don't keep them as pets.
- Report strange behavior. If you see a wild animal acting strangely, contact your local animal control office.
- Bat-proof your home.

## How can I protect my pets against rabies?

Protect your pets by getting them vaccinated and keeping them contained in your home, yard or a kennel. If your pet is bitten by another animal, contact your veterinarian immediately.

## What should I do if I am bitten by an animal?

If you are bitten by an animal, contact your health care provider immediately. Bites should be treated quickly to stop rabies infection from developing. Wash the wound with soap and water for at least five minutes. Thorough washing reduces your risk of developing rabies infection. Report the bite to your local public health department.

## How can I protect myself against bats?

It is best never to handle bats. If a bat is active during the day, is found somewhere bats aren't usually found, or is unable to fly, it is more likely to have rabies. Rabies can only be confirmed in a laboratory, though, so it is best to never handle bats.

If you are bitten by a bat, or if bat saliva gets in your eyes, nose, mouth or a wound, contact your health care provider immediately and wash the site with soap and water for at least five minutes. Whenever possible, the bat should be safely captured so experts can test it for rabies.

## How should I safely capture a bat?

To safely capture a bat, put on leather work gloves. Wait until the bat lands and then place a small box or coffee can over it. Slide a piece of cardboard under the container to trap the bat inside. Tape the cardboard to the container securely and punch small holes in the cardboard to allow the bat to breathe. Contact your local public health department to arrange for the bat to be tested for rabies.

## How can I prevent bats from getting in my home?

To bat-proof your home, contact a professional animal control or wildlife conservation office. The best time to bat-proof your home is during the fall and winter when most bats leave to hibernate. If you want to do the work yourself, here are some suggestions from the CDC.

- Check your home for small holes that might allow bats access.
- Caulk any openings larger than a dime ( $\frac{1}{2}$  inch by  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch).
- Install window screens, chimney caps and draft guards.
- Fill electrical and plumbing holes with stainless steel wool or caulking.
- Ensure all outside doors close tightly.
- Cover outside entry points to attics with loosely hanging bird netting that allows bats to exit, but not re-enter.