



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Rabies Facts

Rabies Hotline
1-800-472-2437 (1-800-4-RABIES)
1-802-223-8697

What is rabies?

Rabies, sometimes known as hydrophobia, is a deadly disease of the brain.

Which animals can get rabies?

Any animal with hair or fur (including humans) can get rabies. However, rabies is most often seen among wild animals such as raccoons, skunks and foxes. Bats are increasingly implicated in human rabies cases. Cats, dogs and livestock can also get rabies if they have not been vaccinated for rabies.

How can you tell if an animal has rabies?

You can not tell whether an animal has rabies simply by looking at it. Rabid animals show a change in their normal behavior. They may show unusual aggression, extreme depression or bizarre behavior.

How common is animal rabies in Vermont?

Hundreds of cases of animal rabies have been reported throughout Vermont since 1992, and the outbreak will continue to be a problem for many years.

How do people get rabies?

The virus can be contracted through the bite of an infected animal.

Non-bite exposures very rarely result in rabies. People are at very low risk of getting rabies from indirect contact with an animal (such as petting or handling animals, or contact with urine, blood or feces).

If a person is exposed, contact your doctor and town health officer, and follow their instructions. Wash the bite wound thoroughly with soap and warm water.

- **What should you do if an animal bites you?**

How do you protect yourself against rabies?

Do not try to touch or pick up wild animals or strays, even baby animals.

Do not try to feed them or make them into pets.

Make sure that all family pets get rabies shots, and keep shots up-to-date. Vaccines start protecting dogs and cats about two weeks to a month after they get the shot.

Report unknown or strangely behaving animals to your town's animal control officer. If the animal is wild, contact your game warden.

Do not make your yard inviting to wild animals. Practice good birdfeeder etiquette. Secure trash, including recyclables.

Fasten trash can lids tightly.

Raccoon-proof your compost.

Feed pets inside the house.

Keep pets indoors at night. If they are out during the day, keep them on a leash or in a closed space. Pets that roam free are more likely to get rabies.

Wear protective gloves when handling a pet that has been involved with a wild or stray animal.

What should you do if you find a bat in a room with an unattended child, or where someone is sleeping?

The bat should be captured and tested for rabies. Any bat that has had physical contact with a person should be tested as well.

Capturing a bat:

- When the bat lands, approach it slowly while wearing gloves and place a box or coffee can over it
- Slide cardboard under the container to trap the bat inside
- Tape the cardboard to the container securely
- Contact the Vermont Rabies Hotline (1-800-472-2437) or the Vermont Department of Health (1-800-640-4374)

Only try to capture the bat if you can do it without getting bitten. Call the Rabies Hotline for guidance if needed. Game wardens, animal control officers, nuisance trappers, town health officers, and others can help capture bats.

- **Rabies Hotline Information**

What should you do if an animal bites you?

Wash the bite wound thoroughly with soap and warm water. Call your doctor.

Try to capture the animal **only** if you can do it without getting bitten again. You are more likely to need rabies shots if the animal cannot be found.

Contact your **town health officer**, and follow their instructions. Residents of Burlington should also call the animal control officer at the Burlington Police Department at 658-2700.

What happens to the animal that bit you?

Dogs or cats that have been vaccinated, or show no sign of rabies, can be watched under supervision of a town health officer. If they don't develop rabies within 10 days, you will not get rabies.

Wild animals cannot be kept alive and watched. They must be killed by game wardens or veterinarians and tested for rabies immediately.

Farm animals, such as horses, cows, goats and sheep, that do not seem sick can usually be watched on site under the supervision of the local health officer or veterinarian.

Who should get rabies shots?

If you are bitten or exposed to animal saliva, your doctor and the Health Department will recommend whether shots are necessary. Preventing rabies requires a series of at least six shots, and they are most often given in the arm. These shots are nearly 100 percent effective.

Remember, the best prevention is to avoid exposure. Stay away from wild or stray animals and be sure to vaccinate your pets.

Additional Rabies Information

- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

Rabies Hotlines

USDA's Vermont Rabies Hotline: 1-800-472-2437 (1-800-4-Rabies)

- **March 15 - November 15:**
Seven days a week, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (except federal holidays)
- **November 15 - March 15:**
Monday - Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (except federal holidays)

Vermont Department of Health: 1-800-640-4374

- Answered Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (except state holidays)

Vermont Department of Health | 108 Cherry Street | Burlington, VT 05402
Voice: 802-863-7200 | In Vermont 800-464-4343 | Fax: 802-865-7754 | TTY/TDD: Dial 711 first
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