



RABIES

Beware of Rabies. Be Aware of Rabies.

RABIES

What is it?

Rabies is a viral disease of mammals that attacks the nervous system and brain, leading to death. In the U.S., it is most commonly found in bats, raccoons, skunks, and foxes. Unvaccinated pets or livestock can also be infected.

People can be infected when they are bitten by an animal with rabies. If not treated, illness begins weeks to months later. Early symptoms may include fever, weakness, headache and body aches. Illness rapidly worsens with sleeplessness, confusion, and agitation. The muscles in the throat can be affected, making swallowing difficult. At this point, death usually occurs within days.

Rabies can be prevented in people by prompt treatment following exposure to the virus.



**HOW CAN YOU
BE EXPOSED TO
RABIES?**

You can be exposed to rabies if you are bitten by an infected animal, or saliva of an infected animal comes in contact with fresh scratches, cuts, or the membranes of the eyes, nose, or mouth.

PREVENTING EXPOSURE

Avoid contact with wild animals — especially bats, skunks, and raccoons. Take these simple steps to protect yourself and your pets and make your home less appealing to wild animals:

- ◇ Never approach or touch wild or stray animals.
- ◇ Do not feed wild animals. If you store food, pet food, or garbage outside, keep it in a sturdy container with a tight fitting lid.
- ◇ Install a chimney cap to prevent bats, raccoons and other animals from entering your home.
- ◇ Seal openings around your home such as attics, crawl spaces, or areas under your porch or deck, to prevent animals from living there.

SIGNS OF RABIES IN ANIMALS

It is not always possible to determine that an animal is infected with rabies by simple observation. Signs in an animal which should lead you to suspect that it may be rabid are:

- ◇ Nervousness
- ◇ Aggressiveness
- ◇ Excessive drooling and foaming at the mouth
- ◇ Abnormal behavior such as:
 - wild animals losing their fear of human beings
 - animals normally active at night being seen during the day

Remember, rabid animals may not look or act sick.

RABIES IN BATS

In Michigan, bats are the animal most often found to be rabid. People usually know when they have been bitten by a bat. However, bats have small teeth that may not leave marks that are easy to see. There are conditions in which a person could be bitten by a bat and not know it or be able to report it.

If you are bitten by a bat , OR if you find a bat in a room with:

- ◇ a sleeping person;
- ◇ an unattended child;
- ◇ a mentally impaired person;
- ◇ an intoxicated person;



do not let the bat go. You should save the bat for testing and seek medical attention immediately. Take care to capture the bat safely — wear leather gloves and when the bat lands, approach it slowly. Place a box or coffee can over the bat. Punch holes in a piece of cardboard to allow the bat to breathe, and slide it under the container to trap the bat inside. Tape the cardboard securely to the container. Contact your local health department or animal control agency to arrange for rabies testing.

RABIES IN OTHER ANIMALS

Besides bats, raccoons, skunks, fox, and other wild animals are the most common carriers of rabies. Thanks to widespread vaccination, rabies has become much less common in pets.

There are multiple strains of rabies virus, each associated with a specific type of animal.

Bat-associated strains of rabies are present throughout Michigan and most other states. Some animal-associated strains are localized to particular regions (see map¹). However, any rabies strain can infect any mammal.

In the past, people have re-located rabies-infected animals that looked healthy, introducing different strains of rabies into new areas. For this reason, it is illegal to bring live raccoons or skunks into Michigan from other states.



1. Blanton, J.D., Robertson, K., Palmer, D. and Rupprecht, C.E. (2010) Rabies surveillance in the United States during 2009. *J Am Vet Med Assoc*, 237, 646-657.

**PROTECTING
YOUR PETS
AND LIVESTOCK**

Make sure your dogs, cats, ferrets, and livestock are vaccinated against rabies and keep their rabies vaccinations up-to-date. Even pets kept indoors can encounter a rabid bat inside the home.

Reduce the chances that your pet may come into contact with wildlife. Do not allow pets to roam unattended.

Contact your veterinarian if you think your pet or livestock has possibly been exposed to rabies.



**WHAT TO DO
IF BITTEN OR
SCRATCHED
BY AN ANIMAL**

- ◇ Immediately wash the wound well with soap and water.
- ◇ Secure the animal, if you can, taking care to prevent additional bites. If the animal is a pet, get the pet owner's name, address, and telephone number.
- ◇ Contact your local health department or animal control agency to report the bite and decide what should be done about the animal.
- ◇ If an animal must be killed, do not damage the head. Rabies testing is done on the brain.
- ◇ When dealing with a dead animal, wear gloves or use a shovel to move the animal. Put the animal's body in a heavy-duty plastic bag and place in a protected area away from people and other animals. If an animal must be stored for testing, keep it cold but do not freeze.
- ◇ Do not delay seeking medical advice. Contact your family doctor or visit the nearest emergency room. Rabies can be prevented with prompt treatment.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT RABIES

| www.michigan.gov/rabies |

| www.cdc.gov/rabies |

WHERE CAN I FIND HELP?

- ◇ Local health department • www.malph.org
- ◇ Your healthcare provider
- ◇ Your veterinarian
- ◇ Animal control
- ◇ Michigan Department of Health and Human Services
Bureau of Disease Control, Prevention and Epidemiology
517-335-8165
After hours: 517-335-9030
- ◇ Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
Animal Industry Division
800-292-3939
After hours: 517-373-0440



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