Animal Shelter Rabies Basics

What is it?

- Rabies is a fatal disease that is caused by a virus that affects the brain.
- Both people and animals can develop rabies if they are exposed to an infected animal.
- Rabies is commonly spread through saliva, bites, scratches and contact with wounds, the eyes, nose, or mouth.
- There is no treatment for rabies in animals; however, additional action may be needed to prevent the disease from spreading.
- In Michigan, rabies is most commonly found in bats and skunks.

How do I prevent it?

1. Minimize

Vaccinate dogs, cats, and ferrets against rabies. Rabies vaccination is required to own or import ferrets older than 12 weeks and to import cats and dogs 12 weeks or older.

Verify rabies vaccination and bite history for dogs and cats on intake.

Train staff in the use of proper safety restraint and personal protective equipment, especially when handling difficult animals or during animal testing and disposal.

Eliminate opportunities for shelter animals to interact with wild animals.

2. Recognize

Animals infected with rabies may act strange or aggressive. They may also twitch, stumble, be weak, have seizures, drool, or have difficulty swallowing.

Often, wild animals infected with rabies will appear tame rather than aggressive.

Euthanize and test suspect animals. Do not damage the head, as it's required for testing.

3. Report

All bites to humans are required to be reported to your local health department within 24 hours.

As a reportable animal disease, rabies is required to be reported to the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development at 800-292-3939.

An animal or person may have been exposed - now what?

- Follow the rabies flowchart found at www.michigan.gov/rabies. There are instructions for both human and animal exposure.
- Seek medical attention immediately for any person exposed to an infected animal.

Michigan Department of AGRICULTURE & Rural Development