

A rabies-suspect dog, cat or other domestic animal inflicting a bite should be observed for ten days after the incident. As long as the animal remains healthy for that period, no risk of rabies transmission exists. If the animal develops signs of rabies or dies during this period, or belongs to a wildlife or exotic species; it must be euthanized humanely and arrangements made for rabies examination. Routine examination of small rodents, rabbits and hares is not necessary, since these animals are essentially free of rabies in New York State. Bats and rabies-suspect terrestrial animals should be presumed rabid until confirmed negative by laboratory diagnosis, and, therefore, require urgent handling.

If a bat is found in a home and exposure could have unknowingly occurred when people were asleep, arrange to have the bat caught and saved. The safest approach is to call an experienced wildlife trapper. If you must attempt capture yourself, wait until the bat lands, place a coffee can over it, and slide a piece of cardboard underneath to contain the bat. The bat may then be tested for rabies by calling the Westchester County Department of Health. If the bat cannot be captured, call the Westchester County Department of Health immediately.

If the rabies-suspect biting animal cannot be observed or tested, or is found to be rabid, treatment must begin immediately. The treatment consists of a dose of rabies-immune globulin and 5 doses of rabies vaccine administered as soon as possible after the exposure.

Veterinarians, wildlife biologists, wildlife rehabilitators, animal control officers and others at risk of contact with rabid animals should be rabies-immunized prior to any possible contact. A person already vaccinated and then exposed to rabies must receive two booster injections three days apart. Individuals having an occupational risk for rabies should routinely (every 2 years) receive a rabies booster injection to maintain a protective rabies titer.

What do I do if my pet is exposed?

Vaccinated pets and other domestic animals in contact with rabid animals must receive a booster dose of vaccine within five days of exposure. Domestic animals not protected by a current vaccination must be strictly confined for six months or destroyed immediately. Wildlife with known contact with a rabid animal should be humanely destroyed.

All animal bites and other exposures to potentially rabid animals must be reported to the Westchester County Department of Health as soon as possible by calling (914) 813-5000.

Westchester County Health Department

(914) 813-5000

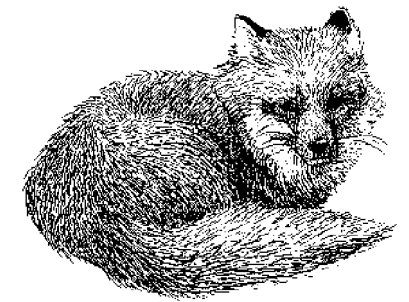
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Rabies in Wildlife



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What is rabies?

Rabies is a viral infection that affects the nervous system of mammals. It is usually transmitted by an infected animal's bite. The incubation period, the period between exposure to the disease and onset of symptoms, ranges from two weeks to many months. There is no known effective treatment once rabies occurs; the disease is almost always fatal. The symptoms may include behavior changes, like unusual aggressiveness or paralysis (frequently beginning in the hind legs or the throat of an animal). Prompt vaccination following a bite can prevent rabies in humans. Periodic vaccination in dogs, cats and livestock, prior to exposure, can protect these animals against the disease.

Where is it found?

In North America:

Rabies was once common in North America dog populations, and still exists in many large areas of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Widespread vaccination programs have eliminated the dog as a major carrier of the disease in the United States and Canada. Several wildlife populations throughout large regions of North America still carry rabies. Outbreaks have occurred in skunks in a broad area of central North America; in raccoons in the southeastern and mid-Atlantic states; in red foxes in Ontario, Canada and, at times; the northeastern United States; and in bats throughout North America.

In New York:

Nearly all counties in New York State are affected by the mid-Atlantic raccoon rabies outbreak, which began in Virginia in 1977 and spread north and east slowly until it reached New York's borders in 1989. This intense

outbreak infected large numbers of raccoons and has spilled over to other wildlife species and unvaccinated domestic animals.

Prior to that, terrestrial rabies in New York State had been largely limited to several northern counties near the Canadian border. These counties have been affected by a persistent red fox rabies outbreak in Ontario, Canada.



Bat rabies has been reported since the late 1950's throughout New York State, including Long Island and New York City. Occasionally, cases of rabies in domestic cats, grey foxes and livestock have been reported in areas otherwise free of rabies. These cases were the result of exposure to bat rabies.

How can I avoid exposure?

Avoiding encounters with wildlife can reduce the risk of exposure to rabies during an outbreak. Do not attempt to handle or capture sick or apparently "orphaned" wildlife. Avoid animals acting strangely, especially those that are unusually tame, aggressive or paralyzed. Be suspicious of daytime activity in raccoons, skunks, and bats, which normally come out only at night. Report animals suspected of rabies to the Westchester County Department of Health.

How do I avoid rabies while hunting or trapping?

You may encounter a rabid animal during an outbreak while hunting or trapping. Animals found dead or captured while acting abnormally should not be skinned or eaten. Deer have only rarely been found rabid even during rabies outbreaks in foxes, skunks and raccoons. Rabid deer are usually easily identified by strikingly abnormal behavior.

Trappers can protect themselves by wearing disposable gloves while handling and skinning animals. If you injure yourself while skinning an animal, store the skin and contact the Westchester County Department of Health to arrange to have the animal's head examined for evidence of rabies infection before proceeding.

How do I protect my pets?

Keep your property free of garbage, pet food, stored bird seed and other foods that may attract wild animals. Make sure that all dogs and cats have up-to-date rabies vaccinations. The rabies vaccination certificate should indicate when booster doses are due. If that information is not available, contact your veterinarian. Dogs and cats will be protected for one or three years depending on the type of vaccine used. However, the first time a dog or cat is vaccinated, regardless of the type of vaccine used, they must be boosted within one year. There is presently no vaccine licensed for use on wildlife or exotic pets (except ferrets).

How do I protect my livestock?

Rabies vaccination is available for cattle, horses and sheep. Although vaccination of all livestock may be too costly, inoculation of valuable animals should be considered. Vaccinate livestock in contact with the general public, in shipment to or from rabies outbreak areas or housed in structures known to be occupied by raccoons or bats. Barns, fences and other barriers should be kept in good repair to keep out sick wildlife. Keep doors closed whenever possible, especially at night.

If your animal appears to be sick or acts abnormally, suspect rabies especially in areas affected by an outbreak. Call a veterinarian. Report suspected cases of rabies in animals to the Westchester County Department of Health.

What do I do if I'm exposed?

Always keep a safe distance away from wildlife. If you are bitten or scratched by a wild animal, or get saliva from a rabies-suspect animal into an open wound or onto a mucous membrane, wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water and seek medical attention immediately. Try to capture the animal without damaging its head. Preserve the dead animal by refrigeration as soon as possible. Report incidents to the Westchester County Department of Health. Disinfect any surface contaminated with tissues or fluids from a rabies-suspect animal with a 10 percent solution of household bleach in water.