



Jackson County Health Department

Rabies



What is Rabies?

Rabies is an acute, fatal disease that is spread to humans by exposure to rabid animals (animals infected with rabies).

How do I get Rabies?

The rabies virus is present in the saliva of an infected animal. The virus enters the body through a break in the skin caused by the teeth of a rabid animal, or by contamination of scratches, abrasions or mucous membranes with the saliva of an infected animal.

Symptom onset in humans is generally 4-6 weeks, but can range five days to more than one year. The virus spreads in the body and enters the brain, where it causes severe disease. Symptoms may include insomnia, anxiety, confusion, hallucinations, agitation, trouble swallowing, and partial paralysis. Death usually occurs within days of the onset of these symptoms.

What animals can transmit Rabies?

Wild animals most likely to carry or be infected with rabies in Michigan are the bat, skunk, fox, raccoon and woodchuck. It is possible, but not as likely, for dogs, cats, ferrets, cattle, horses, sheep, goats, swine, bobcats, and coyotes to be rabid.

How do I know if an animal is rabid?

It's not easy! People tend to think that rabid animals always drool and foam at the mouth. However, most rabid animals only display these symptoms in the late stage of the disease, and sometimes not even then. Rabid animals may stagger, appear restless, aggressive, change their tone of bark or growl, or appear to be choking. Typically wild animals may act friendly. Animals that are normally active at night may become active during the day. Passive animals may become fierce or aggressive.

How do I know if I have been exposed to Rabies virus?

Exposure is defined as either a:

- Bite, any penetration of the skin by teeth, or
- Non-bite, saliva of an infected animal coming in contact with abrasions, open wounds, or mucous membranes.

What should I do if I am exposed to Rabies?

- Wash the affected area thoroughly with soap and

water.

- Get a medical evaluation immediately with your own doctor or at the emergency room.
- Your doctor will clean and evaluate the exposed area, assess the need for rabies vaccine, rabies immune globulin, a tetanus-diphtheria booster, and antibiotic treatment.

What is current anti-rabies treatment like?

- If rabies vaccine or immune globulin is recommended by a physician or the Health Department, it should be started as soon as possible after the exposure. Current rabies vaccines are relatively painless and are given in your arm, like a flu or tetanus vaccine.
- Rabies vaccine series consists of four injections of vaccine over a 14 day period, and immediate administration of rabies immune globulin.

What do I do with an animal that has bitten or scratched a person?

Consider the type of animal:

- Captured wild animals should always be euthanized and tested for rabies immediately. A domestic cat, dog, or ferret that has up-to-date rabies shot documentation shall be confined to the owner's home for 10 days IF NOT ILL.
- If the (vaccinated) animal has symptoms of rabies or develops symptoms during the 10 days, it must be euthanized immediately and tested for rabies.
- An unvaccinated domestic animal should be confined for 10 days for observation. If it becomes ill, it must be euthanized and examined. A rabies vaccination should be given to a healthy animal after the 10 day confinement.
- A stray that appears ill should be euthanized promptly and examined for rabies. A stray that appears healthy may be confined for 4 days to await an owner's claim. If there is no claim, the animal may be euthanized and tested for rabies. No testing is required if the stray is healthy after 10 days.

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