

# RABIES

IT'S NOT JUST YOUR PETS WHO ARE AT RISK



Rabies is a deadly disease caused by a virus that attacks the central nervous system. The virus is secreted in saliva and is usually transmitted to people and animals from an infected animal. Less commonly, rabies can be transmitted when saliva from a rabid animal comes in contact with an open cut on the skin or the eyes, nose, or mouth of a person or animal. Once the outward signs of the disease appear, rabies is nearly always **fatal**.

## What are the signs of rabies in animals?

Once the rabies virus enters the body, it travels along the nerves to the brain. Dogs, cats, and ferrets with rabies may show a variety of signs, including fearfulness, aggression, excessive drooling, difficulty swallowing, staggering, and seizures. Rabid wild animals may only display unusual behavior; for example, an animal that is usually only seen at night may be seen wandering in the daytime. In addition to those signs seen in dogs and cats, horses, cattle, sheep, and goats with rabies may exhibit depression, self-mutilation, or increased sensitivity to light.

## What animals get rabies?

Only mammals can get rabies; birds, fish, reptiles and amphibians do not. Most cases of rabies occur in wild animals — mainly skunks, raccoons, bats, coyotes, and foxes. In recent years, cats have become the most common domestic animal infected with rabies. In Centre County, Pennsylvania, more than 100 cats have tested positive for rabies in the last year. This is because many cat owners do not spay or neuter their cats before the cats are taken to wildlife outdoors. Rabies also affects dogs and cattle in significant numbers and, while not as common, has been diagnosed in horses, goats, sheep, swine and ferrets.



## THE LAW

My pet bit someone!

- Contact health department and animal control
- Urge victim to seek medical attention
- 10 day quarantine for your pet

My pet has been bitten!

- Contact your vet and animal control
- A 45 to 180 day quarantine depending on vaccine status
- If biting animal is known to be rabid – euthanasia of pet.

I was bitten!

- Wash thoroughly with soap and water
- Contact your physician and health department
- May require post exposure prophylaxis
- If possible, capture the animal. If wild, capture or kill, with caution to not damage head. The brain is needed to test for rabies.



## How great is the risk of rabies to humans?

Rabies vaccination and animal control programs, along with better treatment for people who have been bitten, have dramatically reduced the number of human cases of rabies in the United States. Most of the relatively few, recent human cases in this country have resulted from exposures to bats. Dogs are still a significant source of rabies in other countries, so travelers should be aware of this risk when traveling outside of the US.

