

**For more information or assistance contact:**

Your Local Health Department:

**WV DEPT OF HEALTH & HUMAN RESOURCES**  
Bureau for Public Health

Office of Epidemiology and Health Promotion  
Division of Surveillance and Disease Control  
(304) 558-5358 or 1-800-423-1271

Office of Laboratory Services  
(304) 558-3530

Office of Environmental Health Services  
Public Health Sanitation Division  
(304) 558-2981 or 1-800-ENV-HEALTH

**WV DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**  
Animal Health Division  
(304) 558-2214

Your local animal shelter, animal control officer  
or veterinarian.

Developed by:

**West Virginia Association of Sanitarians**

in cooperation with

WV Department of Health & Human Resources  
Bureau for Public Health  
Office of Environmental Health Services &  
Office of Epidemiology & Health Promotion

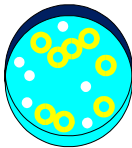
# RABIES



Protect Yourself!  
Protect Your Animals!  
Know The Facts!

## WHAT IS RABIES?

**Rabies** is a virus capable of infecting warm-blooded animals. Rabies mainly affects the brain. The disease has been recognized since ancient times, and is now common in wildlife in North America- notably in bats, skunks, raccoons and foxes. There have not been any naturally occurring cases identified in birds and it is extremely rare in rodents. The disease is usually spread by the bite or scratch of an infected animal. The virus is transmitted through the saliva. Rabies has also been known as *hydrophobia* because the sight of water can make infected animals excited.



## WHAT IS AN EXPOSURE?

An *exposure* to rabies occurs when a person is bitten or scratched by a rabid animal. The virus is “injected” or “scratched-in.” Although the risk is much lower, rabies can also be transmitted when saliva from a rabid animal comes in contact with open cuts or mucous membranes (e.g. mouth, eyes).

Other means of transmission can occur, but are very rare and involve extraordinary circumstances. A *potential exposure* occurs when a person is bitten or scratched by an animal capable of carrying rabies, especially a wild animal, that cannot be captured for observation or examination. Exposures can occur any time of year.



## HOW CAN YOU AVOID EXPOSURE?

Most exposures occur because people don’t consider the risk of rabies. Exposures occur through contact with wildlife or with domestic animals exposed to rabid wildlife. Therefore, avoid raccoons, skunks, foxes, bats and stray or unfamiliar dogs and cats. In addition, wild species, including wild/domestic crossbreeds should not be kept as pets. **State law requires that all dogs and cats be vaccinated against rabies.** This is especially important for “farm or barn” cats and hunting/outdoor dogs. If a cow acts like it is choking, call your veterinarian or wear a plastic obstetrical sleeve if you examine its throat.



**WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU’VE BEEN EXPOSED?**

**WASH THE WOUND** - Immediately wash the wound with warm, soapy water - this can greatly reduce your risk of contracting rabies. Consult your family physician or health care provider for further wound care follow-up.

**CONTACT YOUR LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT-** Report any potential exposure to the Environmental Health Section of the local health department. Be ready to provide detailed information about the circumstances of the exposure, the animal involved, including any distinctive markings and the name of the owner. Information about post-exposure vaccine may also be available.



**WHAT ABOUT THE ANIMAL?**



Domestic cats and dogs properly vaccinated for rabies will need to be confined and observed. Stray or wild animals may need to be captured and/or killed and tested for rabies at the state public health laboratory. Animals do not always have to be sacrificed in

response to a potential rabies exposure! Local health department officials will assist in determining what to do with the animal. If the animal must be killed, be careful not to damage or destroy the brain tissue. Also, take precautions to avoid additional exposure to saliva and brain or other central nervous system tissue. Contact your local animal control officer or local law enforcement official for assistance.

**WHAT ANIMALS ARE AT RISK FOR RABIES?**

Because many people do not routinely vaccinate cats against rabies, they have replaced dogs as the more common pet animal threat to humans. The symptoms of rabies vary. Domestic animals such as cats, dogs and cows may exhibit symptoms of “furious rabies”, “dumb rabies” or rarely, no symptoms at all. Cats often bat at drooling saliva, contaminating their claws. Because of this, cat scratches are almost as dangerous as bites.



Reasonably priced rabies vaccines are available for valuable breeding stock. These should be administered annually by a veterinarian.

Although any warm-blooded animal can be infected with rabies, some animals are more susceptible than others. Raccoons, foxes, other canines and skunks are most commonly found to be rabid. Rodent rabies is very rare in the U.S. simply because the small rodents do not survive attacks by larger, rabid animals. The one exception to this is the groundhog.



Rabies is often isolated in many fruit- and insect-eating bat species in the U.S. Rabid bats can attack humans without provocation. Any contact with a bat in which a bite cannot be ruled out, is considered a potential exposure to rabies. Bats should not be caught or handled.



Any normally nocturnal, wild animal, seen during daylight hours, could be rabid. Wild animals should be avoided, especially those that appear ill.



**WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF RABIES IN ANIMALS?**

- temperament change - friendly animals become aggressive, aggressive animals seem friendly or restless
- unprovoked attacks, biting or scratching anything that moves
- change in bark of dogs
- protruding third eyelid
- drooling or appearance of choking
- tremors, lack of coordination, loss of balance
- paralysis and respiratory failure
- staggering or erratic behavior



Foxes, dogs and possibly skunks, with furious rabies, can run all night, biting everything in their path.