



RABIES FACT SHEET

WHAT IS RABIES?

Rabies is a preventable disease caused by a virus. The disease is mostly found among wild animals, but can be passed to pets and humans. The vast majority of rabies cases reported occur in wild animals like raccoons, skunks, bats, and foxes.

HOW DO YOU GET RABIES?

People usually get rabies from the bite or scratch of a rabid animal. It is also possible, but rare, that people may get rabies if saliva from the infected animal gets directly into your eyes, nose, mouth, or a wound.

SYMPTOMS

The rabies virus infects the central nervous system, ultimately causing disease in the brain and death. The first symptoms of rabies may be very similar to the flu and may last for days (fever, headache, weakness, etc). Later symptoms may include:

- Insomnia
- Anxiety
- Confusion
- Slight of partial paralysis
- Excitation
- Hallucinations
- Difficulty swallowing
- Hydrophobia (fear of water)

Some animals may show no symptoms of rabies. Other animals may exhibit aggressive behavior, increased drooling, stumbling or falling, refusing to eat, moving slowly or appearing paralyzed, and loss of fear of people.

TREATMENT

If you've been bitten by an animal that is known to have rabies, you'll receive a series of shots to prevent the rabies virus from infecting you. Discuss treatment options with your doctor.

PREVENTION

- Visit your veterinarian with your pet on a regular basis and keep rabies vaccinations up-to-date for all cats, ferrets, and dogs.
- If bit by an animal, seek medical treatment and report the bite to your local health department.
- Take measures to prevent your pet from coming into contact with wild animals.

DGHD EFFORTS

Reports of suspected and confirmed cases of disease are made to the Delaware Public Health District (DPHD). The DPHD investigates potential sources of illness, conducts surveillance for the spread of disease, and engages in community outreach and education. The DPHD monitors all reports of animal bites or exposures and either quarantines or ensures euthanasia and testing when applicable. Based on these two measures the Health District can recommend the lifesaving post exposure prophylaxis when necessary.