

Rabies

What is rabies?

Rabies is a disease that affects the brain and spinal cord. It is caused by a virus in the saliva (spit) of infected animals. If not treated, rabies is always fatal.

How do people get rabies?

- You can get rabies when the virus in an infected animal's spit gets into your bloodstream. This happens when an infected animal bites or scratches you, or licks a cut or wound on your body. You can also get rabies when spit from an infected animal touches the lining of your mouth, nose, or eyes.
- Animals that can carry rabies include bats, skunks, foxes, coyotes, and raccoons. Cats and dogs that have not had a rabies vaccination can also carry and spread rabies.

How can I tell if an animal has rabies?

When an animal has rabies, it is called "rabid". It may be hard to tell if an animal has rabies. An animal with rabies may or may not act strangely or show any symptoms, so any animal bite should be treated right away. Any animal that bites a person should be captured and watched for signs of the disease.

What should I do if someone is bitten by an animal?

Right away:

- Wash the bite area thoroughly with soap and water for at least 15 minutes. Flush the wound area again and again with water during this 15 minutes.
- Apply an antiseptic or alcohol to the area.
- **See a healthcare provider as soon as possible.** You do not have to go to the Emergency Department, just be sure to see a healthcare provider (such as your family doctor) as soon as you can. The healthcare provider should not stitch the wound.
- Call 811, the Nova Scotia Telecare Service, if you need advice from a Registered Nurse.

How can I prevent rabies?

- Get immunized against rabies if you are in a high-risk group. Talk to your family practitioner about immunization. High-risk groups include:
 - › Animal control workers
 - › Cave explorers
 - › Conservationists
 - › Hunters and trappers, and people hunting and trapping in high-risk areas
 - › Lab workers
 - › Travellers to areas where rabies is common
 - › Veterinarians
 - › Wildlife workers
- Register, license, and vaccinate all domestic animals, including cats and dogs.
- Vaccinate farm animals and livestock.
- If you have pets, know the signs and symptoms of rabies.
- Be aware of the dangers of picking up sick or hurt animals or trying to tame wild animals.
- Do not move wild animals to other areas of Nova Scotia or to other provinces.
- Do not feed wild animals or leave leftover food around yards, parks, or other places. This may attract wild animals.
- Close up small holes and entryways anywhere bats could get in and come in contact with people, pets, or farm animals. This includes homes, cottages, sheds, and barns.

In Canada, the USA, and the UK, almost all dogs and cats are rabies-free either through needles or quarantine (UK). In other countries greater care is advised so if you are bitten seek the advice of an experienced healthcare provider as soon as possible. For a more complete list of rabies-free countries see: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2016/infectious-diseases-related-to-travel/rabies>.

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