

# PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET



COUNTY MICHIGAN  
HEALTH DIVISION

Department of Health & Human Services

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## Rabies

### What is Rabies?

Rabies is a virus that infects the brain of man, domestic and wild animals.

### What are the symptoms of Rabies?

**EARLY SYMPTOMS:** Fever, headaches, tiredness, general anxiety or worry and a variety of symptoms around the bite (for example: pain, tingling, numbness).

**LATER SYMPTOMS:** Trouble swallowing, paralysis, seizure, coma and eventual death (nearly 100% fatal).

### How long after exposure do symptoms begin?

It may take several weeks (usually two to eight), months, or up to one year to get sick after exposure. This can vary depending upon the size of the wound, amount of nerve supply at the wound, distance from the brain, amount of virus entering the wound and the amount of protective clothing.

### How is Rabies spread?

The rabies virus is found in the saliva of infected animals. The virus is spread through a bite or scratch from an infected animal.

### What animals are most affected?

**DOMESTIC:** Cats and dogs

**WILD:** Skunks, raccoons, foxes and bats.

### What animals are rarely affected?

Squirrels, chipmunks, mice, rats, hamsters, rabbits or hares.

### How can Rabies be prevented?

- Have a veterinarian vaccinate cats and dogs regularly.
- Do not handle stray or wild animals; call local animal control experts to help.
- Get prompt treatment from your doctor/clinic.

## What to do if bitten?

DOMESTIC ANIMALS: Call a veterinarian and follow his/her advice;

- PEOPLE:
- Clean the wound immediately with soap and warm water; this is the most effective prevention against rabies.
  - Call your doctor or clinic and follow his/her advice (series of rabies shots and tetanus booster may be needed).
  - Call local animal control office which can assist in capture, quarantine and testing of the animal.

## What information may be needed to help decide if Rabies vaccine is needed?

- Kind of animal - wild or domestic (pet).
- Known or unknown animal? (In general, wild animal bites are always of more concern than domestic pets since it is not easy to decide if this is normal or abnormal behavior).
- If it was a domestic animal, determine if the animal was provoked or unprovoked to bite?
- Was the skin broken from the bite? To what extent? Was there bleeding from the wound?

## What are the general guidelines for giving Rabies vaccine?

Rabies vaccine is usually recommended for a wild animal bite (especially skunk, raccoons, foxes and bats). Vaccine occasionally is recommended for unprovoked bites by domestic animals that are not available for observation/testing.

## What vaccines are used to prevent Rabies disease?

Two types of treatment must be used together to prevent rabies disease once a person has been exposed:

- Rabies Immune Globulin containing antibodies to fight the virus; AND (either)
- Purified Chick Embryo Cell Culture (PCEC) - five doses given over one month's time helps you develop your own antibodies to rabies virus; OR
- Human Diploid Cell Vaccine (HDCV) is another vaccine that may be used in place of RVA.

## What may happen to animals that have bitten someone?

HEALTHY DOGS/CATS: Caged away from other animals/people for ten days and examined by a veterinarian before return to the owners.

WILD AND UNWANTED  
STRAY ANIMALS:

Humanely destroyed and brain tissue sent for immediate testing. There is no confinement period for wild animals.

**For more information on Rabies, call (248) 858-1406 or toll free 1 800) 848-5533. Rabies on animal testing, call (248) 858-1286 or toll free 1 (888) 350-0900, Ext 8-1286**

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