

Rabies Prevention

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Rabies is a disease caused by a virus that attacks the nervous system. It is transmitted in the saliva through the bite of infected animals.

Rabies in Colorado

In Colorado and throughout the United States, many different wild animal species can carry rabies. Skunks and bats are the most significant sources of rabies in Colorado, but other wild animals can also be infected. Domestic animals, such as dogs, cats, horses, and livestock can become infected with rabies through contact with wild animals. Small rodents and rabbits do not usually carry rabies.

Rabies is becoming more common in wildlife along Colorado's Front Range, placing both humans and animals at risk for this deadly disease.

Rabid animals usually show abnormal behavior, such as aggression, confusion, or lack of fear of people.

Contact with infected wild or domestic animals places you and your family at risk for rabies infection. Immediate medical treatment is required if a person or domestic animal is exposed to rabies. Rabies in humans is 100 percent preventable through prompt appropriate medical care. Your health provider, possibly in consultation with your state or local health department, will decide if you need the rabies vaccination series.

Rabies causes severe inflammation in the brain and spinal cord and is nearly always fatal. All mammals are susceptible to rabies, including humans.

Animals

If a wild animal is acting strangely, stay away from it. Watch for:

- General appearance of sickness
- Extreme fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Problems swallowing, lots of drool or saliva
- Change in temperament, aggression, restlessness, irritability, or reacting to imaginary objects
- Confusion, stupor, lack of coordination
- Circling, staggering
- Tremors or seizures
- Trouble moving or paralysis

People

In people, it may take one to three months for signs of rabies to appear. But once people get rabies, they almost always die. That is why it's so important to go see a doctor right away if you've been bitten by an animal that might have rabies.

Early symptoms of rabies in people include:

- Fever
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Feeling tired

If the disease develops, symptoms include:

- Pain and tingling at the place they were bitten
- Seeing things that aren't really there
- A fear of water because of sudden, strong tightening of the muscles in the throat
- Being paralyzed and unable to move parts of the body

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Get the Facts

Half of the people who die from rabies are under the age of 15.

- In the United States, rabies has been reported in every state except Hawaii.
- Rabies gets its name from a Latin word that means “to rage” because animals with rabies sometimes act as if they are angry.
- Rabies attacks the brain and spinal cord. If it is not prevented, it will cause death.
- Any mammal can get rabies. It can only be passed to another animal or a person through saliva. You cannot get rabies from blood.
- Animals with rabies may act differently. It’s always best to stay away from wild animals and to be careful with other people’s pets.

What should I do if I am bitten by an animal?

- Clean and wash the wound for at least 5 minutes with soap and water.
- All animal bites should be evaluated by a physician immediately. Antibiotics, a rabies vaccine, and a tetanus booster might be needed.

Who to contact about rabid animals:

If you or a family member has been in contact with an animal that could have rabies, seek medical attention immediately and contact your local health department. If you live in Denver County, call 311 to make a report.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control & Prevention; Tri-County Health Department.

Prevent rabies:

- Vaccinate your dogs, cats and ferrets against rabies;
- Keep your pets under your supervision so they don’t catch rabies from a wild animal;
- Avoid touching wild animals. If you see one acting strangely, call your local animal control.
- Have dogs, cats, horses, and livestock vaccinated regularly by your veterinarian.
- Maintain control of your pets by keeping cats indoors and keeping dogs under direct supervision.
- Spay or neuter your pets to reduce the number of unwanted or stray animals in your community.
- Call your local animal control agency if you’re having trouble with stray animals.
- Call the Colorado Division of Wildlife office at 303-291-7227 if you have problems with wild animals.

