

# Animal Bites & Rabies



## **What is rabies?**

Rabies is a disease that affects the brain. It's usually passed from animal to animal but it can be passed from animals to people. In the United States, raccoons, skunks, foxes and bats are the main animals that get rabies.

## **How do you know if an animal has rabies?**

You can't tell if an animal has rabies by just looking at it. A clue though is if the animal is acting strangely.

## **What should I do if I get bitten by an animal?**

Animal bites occur commonly and carry a risk of infection with various disease agents. Animal bite wounds should be washed immediately and thoroughly with soap and water. A health care provider should be promptly consulted about the possible need for antibiotic treatment and tetanus vaccination.

Rabies is deadly, so all bites and scratches from a suspect animal must be reported to local authorities. Bat bites are often undetectable on people. If you find a dead bat in your house, you should contact the Health Department at 608-776-4895.

Because of the possibility of rabies virus transmission, the biting animal should be captured if it is safe to do so. In the case of an owned domestic animal, information on the owner and location of the animal should be obtained.

**DO NOT DESTROY OR RELEASE AN ANIMAL THAT HAS BITTEN A PERSON** until after consultation with a public health official. In nearly all cases, observation or testing of the animal can eliminate the need to administer the series of injections to prevent rabies.

## **Prevention Measures**

Exposure to rabies may be minimized by the following measures:

- Eliminate stray dogs and cats and enforce leash and license laws.
- Vaccinate pet dogs, cats, ferrets, and livestock against rabies.
- Stay away from all wild animals, especially those acting abnormally.
- Teach your children not to approach any unfamiliar animals.
- Do not keep exotic or wild animals as pets, regardless of how young or cute they are.
- Exclude bats from living quarters by keeping screens in good repair and by closing any small openings that could allow them to enter.
- Persons traveling to developing countries in which rabies is highly prevalent, or persons who are at ongoing risk of possible rabies exposure (e.g., veterinarians, animal control officers), should ask their doctor about receiving the PRE-exposure rabies vaccinations.

## **Report Sick or Dead Wildlife**

If you find a dead animal, please visit the [Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources](#) website for instructions. The DNR has disease monitoring programs for specific wildlife species. If you are told to dispose of a dead animal, do not touch it with your bare hands. Wear gloves or an inverted plastic bag and either bury the carcass on your property or double bag it and place it in your trash. Wash your hands after disposing of the carcass.

## **For more information:**

- [Department of Health Services \(DHS\) Rabies fact sheet, P-42081](#)
- [Wisconsin Rabies Prevention flowchart \(Rabies algorithm\)](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) – Rabies](#)
- [Rabies Data](#)



**Animal bite wounds should be washed immediately and thoroughly with soap and water.**

**[Click here for more information.](#)**

Initial treatment for an animal bite should include thorough cleansing, however all animal bites should be seen by a physician