



# Rabies

FACT SHEET 13-001-0811

## Key facts

- Rabies occurs in more than 150 countries and territories.
- Worldwide, more than 55,000 people die of rabies every year.
- Dogs are the source of 99% of human rabies deaths in undeveloped countries.
- Rabies is a preventable disease. Wound cleansing and immunization within a few hours after contact with a suspect rabid animal can prevent the onset of rabies and death.

## What is rabies?

Rabies is a viral disease affecting the central nervous system. It is transmitted from infected animals to man and usually causes death once symptoms appear.

## Who gets rabies?

All mammals (warm-blooded animals) including man are susceptible to rabies.

## How is rabies spread to humans?

Rabies is almost always contracted by exposure to a rabid animal. The exposure is nearly always through a bite, but rabies can also be transmitted if a rabid animal scratches a person or if its saliva comes into contact with broken skin. *It is important to note that in non-developed countries, dogs are the main source of the rabies virus, however, in the U.S. and other developed nations, bats and wild animals become the major concern due to an active vaccination programs for pets.*

## What are the symptoms of rabies?

Early symptoms may include irritability, headache, fever and itching or pain at the exposure site. It is important to note that by the time any symptoms appear, rabies often cannot be successfully treated. Therefore, evaluation by a medical provider is essential for anyone suffering from any kind of animal bite or scratch, especially in deployed settings.

## Is a human able to spread rabies?

Person to person transmission is extremely rare; however, precautions should be taken to prevent exposure to the saliva of the infected person.

## What is the treatment for an animal bite or scratch?

The most effective treatment to prevent rabies or other infections is immediate and thorough cleansing of the wound with liberal amounts of soap and water. All wounds should be evaluated by a medical provider for risk of rabies. If warranted, the medical provider may treat the patient with an injection of rabies immune globulin and begin a rabies vaccine series.

## How can I tell if an animal has rabies?

Often you cannot. Despite common belief that rabid animals are easily identified by foaming at the mouth and aggressive behavior, infected animals may not have any apparent symptoms or behave in an unusual manner. All bites or scratches from animals should be evaluated by a qualified medical provider in consultation with a veterinarian.

## What should I do if an animal bites or scratches me?

Immediately clean the wound with large amounts of water and promptly seek medical attention. Secure the animal if possible without sustaining any additional injuries. The animal should be turned over to a veterinarian for evaluation. A medical provider will evaluate the injury for rabies risk and other potential infections. If your medical provider believes the risk of rabies to be significant enough to treat, you'll be given a series of vaccinations over a two-week period. This treatment is extremely effective but must be started as soon as possible after the injury.

## For More Information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)  
<http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/transmission/index.html>

World Health Organization (WHO)  
<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs099/en/>

U.S. Army Public Health Command  
Epidemiology and Disease Surveillance / Health Risk Management Portfolios  
Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD 21010-5403  
Commercial (410) 436-4655/DSN 312-584-4655

**Approved for Public Release**