



Rabies

Rabies is a viral disease of mammals found worldwide that causes neurologic illness and is almost always fatal once clinical symptoms develop. More than 90% of all animal rabies cases in the U.S. occur in wildlife, and most human cases are associated with bats. Rabies is preventable.

General Rabies Information

Hosts and Transmission

While all mammals can become infected with and transmit rabies, the primary hosts in the US are:

- Bats
- Raccoons
- Skunks
- Foxes
- Coyotes
- Feral cats

Like humans, almost all animals that become infected with rabies will die unless post-exposure treatment is given before symptoms develop.

Rabies is generally transmitted through the saliva of an infected animal, either through a bite or scratch.

Signs and Symptoms

Human symptoms of rabies can include:

- Weakness or discomfort
- Fever
- Headache
- Progressive neurologic dysfunction and behavior changes

Once symptoms of rabies infection begin, the infection is almost always fatal.

Preventive vaccinations and medical care can effectively prevent the illness if given before symptoms develop.

Prevention and Control

Rabies is completely preventable in humans.

To prevent the disease while visiting the parks:

- Enjoy wildlife from a distance
- Alert a park ranger if you see a sick or strangely acting animal
- Never touch a bat and tell park staff if a bat is found in a room
- Vaccinate and spay and neuter your pets
- Educate children about rabies, as they are most at risk

See a physician immediately if you are bitten or scratched by any animal of unknown rabies vaccination status.

Treatment

- Immediately wash an animal bite or scratch wound with soap and water to decrease risk of infection
- Notify a park ranger and see your doctor if bitten by an animal
- Your doctor and local health department will decide if you need a rabies vaccination

If you are exposed to rabid animals or animals of unknown rabies status, tell a park ranger and consult your healthcare provider.

One Health and Rabies

Human impacts on the environment, including land development and climate change, are affecting habitats where wild animals live. Some of these changes to the land, air, and water promote the transmission and spread of diseases such as rabies in mammals.

By protecting natural environments and their ecological properties and processes, and by appreciating wildlife from a distance, we can help protect ourselves from rabies – this is One Health in action.



CREDIT: CDC

Map of terrestrial rabies reservoirs in the United States during 2010.

More Information

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www.cdc.gov/rabies