

Information For You

How soon do symptoms appear?

In humans, the time between exposure and the onset of symptoms is variable but is normally three to eight weeks. Although rare, incubation periods as short as 10 days and as long as one year or more have been reported.

What is the treatment for rabies?

Rabies can be prevented through prompt action and administration of rabies vaccine.

If you are exposed to the saliva of a potentially rabid animal, immediately clean the area with liberal amounts of soap and water. If the exposure is to the eye or a mucous membrane, flush the area with warm water.

If you think you have been exposed to a rabid animal, contact your physician. He or she may prescribe a series of rabies vaccinations.

What happens if rabies is not treated?

All animal bites, regardless of whether the animal is available for rabies testing, should be evaluated by a health professional to determine if treatment is necessary. Untreated cases in which transmission of the virus has occurred usually result in death.

What happens if my pet bites someone?

1. You should find your pet's rabies vaccination papers.
2. You should take your pet immediately to a veterinarian to have its current health status checked.
3. If your pet is healthy, it will have to be isolated and quarantined for 10 days. This means it has to be kept in an area where it:
 - a. Cannot get out.
 - b. Cannot come into contact with humans or any other animals.(If your pet is not healthy, it may have to be euthanized.)
4. Check your pet daily. If its health changes or your pet dies, contact your veterinarian immediately. You should then call your state or local health department.
5. At the end of the 10-day period, your pet needs to be checked by a veterinarian to ensure that it is still healthy.



For more information, contact

Division of Disease Control
at 800.472.2180
or visit www.ndhealth.gov/disease

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RABIES

What You Should Know

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What is rabies?

Rabies is a viral disease that affects the central nervous system. It is transmitted from infected mammals to humans and is usually fatal once symptoms appear. Fortunately, human rabies is rare in the United States due to widespread vaccination of pets and the use of rabies vaccine after exposure.

What animals can get rabies?

All mammals, including humans, are susceptible to rabies. In North Dakota, skunks are the primary carrier of rabies and are the species that generally infects other animals. Domestic animals that have tested positive for rabies in North Dakota are dogs, cats, cattle, horses, bison, elk and sheep. Wild animals that have tested positive include skunks, raccoons, foxes, coyotes, bats and muskrats.

How is rabies spread?

Rabies is contracted by exposure to a rabid animal. The exposure usually occurs through a bite, but scratches and contact of saliva with broken skin and mucous membranes (eyes, nose and mouth) are also possible routes of transmission. Always consult a physician if you are bitten or scratched by an animal or otherwise exposed to a potentially rabid animal.

What can be done to prevent the spread of rabies?

- Stay away from wild animals.
- Eliminate all stray dogs and cats.
- Vaccinate all dogs, cats and pet ferrets.
- Keep pets from contact with wild animals.
- Do not keep exotic or wild animals as pets.
 - In North Dakota, it is illegal to keep a skunk or raccoon as a pet.
- Do not let wild animals, particularly skunks, take up residence around farmsteads or livestock, as they are the primary carriers of rabies in North Dakota.
- When attending to sick livestock, wear protective gloves and avoid direct contact with the animal's saliva.

What are the signs and symptoms of rabies in animals?

Signs and symptoms of rabies in animals vary greatly. Some rabid animals may exhibit many classical symptoms of the disease, while others may exhibit only a few and some show none until death occurs.

Symptoms of rabies in animals may include any one or more of the following:

- Excitability
- Vicious attacks
- Biting
- Agitation
- Restlessness
- Aggressiveness
- Lack of fear
- Faulty gait
- Excessive salivation
- Aversion to water
- Muscular impairment
- Partial paralysis
- Convulsions
- Inability to swallow
- Lack of coordination
- Eventual death

Some rabid animals do not exhibit typical rabies symptoms. Instead, they may display other general-illness symptoms, such as the following:

- Avoidance of contact with humans or other animals
- Lethargy
- Loss of appetite

A lack of specific symptoms does not mean the absence of rabies, particularly if there is reason to suspect the animal may have been exposed to skunks or other rabid animals.