

IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

RABIES

Rabies is a rare but deadly disease, caused by a virus that attacks the nervous system. Rabies exists throughout the world and many people die from it. Vaccination and animal control programs have reduced the frequency of cases in the United States. The last human case in Ohio occurred in 1970.

Symptoms

- Signs of rabies in humans usually begin within 1 to 3 months of exposure and include:
 - Fever or headache are early signs, and a prickling or itching sensation at the site of bite
 - Confusion, sleepiness, hallucinations, agitation, fear of water
 - Having more saliva than normal, difficulty swallowing
- Signs of rabies in an animal:
 - Behavior changes: unusual aggressiveness, excitement, and irritability. A wild animal may appear affectionate and friendly and lose fear of people and natural enemies.
 - Staggering, convulsions, spitting, choking, frothing at the mouth and paralysis
- Symptoms may continue for 2 to 10 days. Once signs of rabies appear, the disease is nearly always fatal. Animals usually die within a few days after showing signs of rabies.

Transmission

- Rabies is usually found among wild animals such as raccoons, bats, skunks, coyote, and foxes. Tame animals like cats, dogs, horses, and livestock can get rabies if they are not vaccinated.
- Rabies is spread through contact with infected saliva. This usually happens during a bite. Contact with brain or nerve tissue may spread rabies, but other body fluids do not.
- Other animals (besides mammals), such as birds, reptiles, fish, and insects *never* get rabies.

Treatment

- Several tests on blood, spinal fluid, and biopsies are necessary to diagnose rabies in humans.
- There are no tests for animals that can be used while they are alive. Animals with signs of rabies should be put down so they can be sent to the Ohio Department of Health for testing.

Prevention

- If you are bitten by an animal, wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water and contact your doctor and your local health department immediately. If it can be done safely, have someone try to capture the animal without damaging it.
- Vaccines are available for dogs, cats, ferrets, and horses. These vaccines are important to protect your pets and you, if your animal is bitten by a rabid wild animal.
- If your pet has been in a fight with an animal, wear gloves and isolate your pet for several hours to avoid exposing yourself. Call your veterinarian right away for a booster shot and observation.
- Human vaccines are available for lab workers, animal handlers and others at high risk.
- Spay or neuter pets to help reduce the number of unwanted, unvaccinated animals. Call animal control to remove all stray animals from your neighborhood.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.



c/o Franklin County Public Health, 280 East Broad Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215-4562

Call: (614) 525-8888 • After Hours: (614) 525-3965 • Fax: (614) 525-8890

Email: idsr@franklincountyohio.gov • Web: www.idrsinfo.org

