

What is rabies?

Rabies is a disease that is often transmitted through a bite from an infected (rabid) animal. Most rabies cases in the US occur in wild mammals, such as raccoons, skunks, bats, and foxes. Rabies virus causes disease in the brain and can lead to death. There is currently no treatment for rabies. You should see your doctor right away if you are bitten or scratched by an animal.

What is considered a rabies exposure?

Exposure to rabies occurs when a person or animal is bitten or scratched by a rabid animal and the virus enters the body of the victim. Rabies can also be spread when saliva from a rabid animal comes in contact with open cuts. Rabies exposures can occur at any time during the year but are more common in warmer months when both people and animals are active outdoors.

For more information about rabies and rabies surveillance in West Virginia, please visit the Division of Infectious Disease Epidemiology website at www.dide.wv.gov.

For more information or assistance, contact your local health department.

For a rabies consult, contact:
Bureau for Public Health
Office of Epidemiology
and Prevention Services
Division of Infectious Disease Epidemiology
304-558-5358

For testing of potentially rabid animals,
contact:
Office of Laboratory Services
304-558-3530

For animal health information, contact:
West Virginia Department of Agriculture
Animal Health Division
304-558-2214

-or-

Your local animal shelter, animal control officer, or veterinarian.



RABIES



Protect yourself.
Protect your animals.
Get the facts!



How can you avoid rabies exposures?

Avoiding contact with wild animals and stray or unknown dogs and cats, even if they appear friendly, is the best way to prevent exposures to rabies. Never keep wild species or wild/domestic mixed breeds (e.g. hybrid wolves) as pets.

What animals can get rabies?

Any warm-blooded animal can become infected with rabies. Raccoons, foxes, and skunks are often found to be rabid.

The most common way for people to get rabies in the US is through contact with a rabid bat. Bats should never be handled or caught. Encounters with bats are considered high risk for rabies.

It is important to vaccinate outdoor pets since they are more likely to encounter rabid animals than indoor pets. West Virginia state law requires that all dogs and cats be vaccinated against rabies. Contact a veterinarian if you think your pet may have rabies.



What should you do if you think you have been exposed to rabies?

1. If you were bitten or scratched by an animal, immediately rinse the bite/scratch area with warm, soapy water; this can reduce your risk of getting rabies. Contact your doctor.
2. Report any potential rabies exposures to your local health department. Provide information about your exposure and the person(s) involved. Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) may be recommended based on the type of exposure.

What should be done with the animal that caused the exposure?

Stray or wild animals should be put to sleep so that rabies testing of the brain can be done at the West Virginia Office of Laboratory Services.

Not all animals should be put to sleep as a result of a potential rabies exposure. Local health department staff can help decide what should be done with the animal.

Where in West Virginia is rabies a concern?

Rabies from bats is a concern across the state, while rabies from raccoons has been found in many counties in the eastern part of West Virginia.

Distribution of Wildlife Reservoirs for Rabies (2010 data)

