Know the FACTS

Rabies and Animal Bites

Rabies is a preventable viral disease usually spread through the bite of an infected animal or contact with its saliva. Although it is almost always fatal once symptoms appear, prompt medical care, wound washing and reporting the bite can help prevent infection in humans.

What is rabies?

Rabies is a deadly viral disease that attacks the nervous system. Rabies can infect all mammals and is most commonly seen in bats, skunks, raccoons and other wild animals. However, dogs, cats and humans can also be infected.

Each year in Ohio, rabies is found in approximately 30 animals, mostly wild. Rabies infects very few humans in the United States.

How do I know if an animal has rabies?

You cannot tell if an animal has rabies just by looking at it. A sample from the animal must be tested to determine a diagnosis. However, an animal with rabies may exhibit strange or unnatural behavior due to the effects of the virus on the brain.



Signs of rabies may include:

- A wild animal that seems unusually tame or isn't afraid to approach people.
- An animal out during the day that is usually active only at night, such as a skunk, fox or bat.
- A pet that has trouble walking, eating or drinking, or has a behavior change.
- A normally calm animal that acts in an agitated or aggressive manner.
- A bat that can't fly or has been caught by a dog or cat.

How do I know if a person has rabies?

There is no single test that can diagnose rabies in people. **If rabies is suspected, it is important to see a healthcare provider right away** for testing and treatment. If a person was exposed to a rabid animal, post-exposure treatments will be given immediately.

How do I report an animal bite?

When a person or pet is bitten by an animal, regardless of whether it's a pet or wild animal, **the bite must be reported to the local health jurisdiction where the bite occurred**. This report should be made within 24 hours of the bite. The local health department will complete a rabies exposure risk assessment and provide guidance to the person who reported the bite.

HAMILTON COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH

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How can I prevent rabies?

Keeping your pets up to date on their rabies vaccinations is one of the best ways to protect animals and people from rabies. Because protection can decrease over time, regular booster vaccinations are important. Talk to your veterinarian if you have questions about your pet's rabies vaccination schedule.

For people, pre-exposure rabies vaccination is recommended for those whose work or activities put them at higher risk of rabies exposure, such as laboratory workers, wildlife handlers and people who frequently encounter bats.

Bats are the leading cause of rabies deaths in people in the United States. In Ohio, strains of rabies in bats have been found in nearly every county. Here are some tips for bat-proofing your home:

- Examine your home or building for holes and fill or repair any openings.
- Install and maintain window screens and chimney caps.
- Use draft guards to help seal doors to attics and basements.
- Fill electrical and plumbing holes with steel wool or caulk.
- Keep doors and windows closed when not in use.

What should I do if I've been bitten by an animal?

- Wash the wound with soap and water for 10-15 minutes.
- Call your doctor or hospital emergency room right away.
- Call your local health department immediately to report the incident. Someone from the health department will instruct you on what to do next.

Ohio law requires all animal bites and scratches to be reported to the local health department. **Hamilton County residents can report a bite or scratch by calling 513-946-7847, Monday through Friday from 7:30 A.M. to 4 P.M.** If you call outside of business hours, leave a message and someone will return your call within one business day.

Additional resources

- **Hamilton County Public Health**: bit.ly/HCPHRabies
- **Ohio Department of Health**: bit.ly/ODHRabies

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