



IONIA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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RABIES

What is rabies?

Rabies is a viral disease that infects mammals. It is usually transmitted from animal to animal, but can also infect humans. Rabies is transmitted in saliva and is found in brain tissue. Animal bites should always be reported to your medical provider and local health department to determine if there has been a possible exposure to rabies. Prompt administration of Rpep (Rabies post-exposure prophylaxis) can prevent the development of rabies. If Rpep is not administered and symptoms of rabies develop, it is nearly always fatal.

What are the symptoms?

It may take several weeks (usually 2-8 weeks), months, or up to one year to get sick after exposure. Rabies travels up the nerves from the site of the bite to the brain, and this causes variability in the onset of symptoms.

Early symptoms

- Fever, headaches, fatigue, general anxiety or worry, insomnia, confusion, agitation.
- Pain, tingling, or numbness at the site of the bite.

Later symptoms

- Trouble swallowing, delirium, hypersalivation (excess saliva/drooling), fear of water, paralysis, seizure, coma, and eventual death (nearly 100% fatal).

How is it spread?

Rabies virus is found in the saliva and brain matter of infected animals.

The virus is spread through a bite or scratch from an infected animal or through contact with intact mucous membranes/saliva/and brain matter.

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Prevent Disease; Prolong Life; Protect the Environment!



Animals that are considered higher risk for rabies exposure include:

Bats, foxes, raccoons, skunks, and coyotes

*animals exhibiting aggressive or abnormal behavior

Animals that are less likely to carry rabies

Rodents, squirrels, hamsters, mice, rabbits, rats, and voles

How is it prevented?

Clean the bite or scratch wound immediately with soap and warm water; this is the most effective prevention against rabies. Call your health care provider and follow his/her advice. A series of four rabies shots, a single dose of immune globulin, and a tetanus booster may be needed. When calling, be sure to tell your health care provider the following:

- ▯ The kind of animal (wild or domestic). Wild animal bites are always of more concern than those from domestic pets.
- ▯ Was the skin broken from the bite? Was there bleeding from the wound?
- ▯ Rabies vaccine status of the biting animal.
- ▯ Circumstances of the bite incident and behavior of the animal. Provoked or unprovoked?

Animal Bite/Rabies Risk Management

Call your local animal control office (Ionia County Dispatch 616-527-0400) or animal management company to assist in the capture of the animal if necessary.

Domestic pets

- Confine the pet away from other animals and people for 10 days under guidance by Ionia County Animal Control Staff.

Wild/Stray Animals

- Wild or stray animals involved in a bite situation will require guidance by Public Health staff to determine if rabies testing is necessary.
- All animals that require testing will be humanely euthanized and brain tissue sent for immediate testing.
- If a wild animal has bitten a pet, call your veterinarian and follow his/her advice.

Bats

- **DO NOT LET THE BAT GO if one is found inside your home.**
- Collect the bat if you can do so safely or call an animal management company.

- To safely collect a bat, wear leather gloves and use a small container or box to hold the bat, taping it closed once the bat is inside. Clear plastic food storage containers work great! Please keep the bat in a cool environment. (Do not put in freezer; this will delay testing as it will need to be thawed first)
- Call Ionia County Health Department Communicable Diseases 616-527-5341 to determine if there is a need for rabies testing of the bat.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider.