

Disease Prevention

5 Facts About Rabies and Your Pet



Rabies is a deadly disease caused by a virus that attacks the brain and nervous system of mammals. The good news is that your pets can be protected from rabies — all it takes is an up-to-date vaccination from their veterinarian.

How do pets get rabies?

Pets get rabies by getting bitten by, or coming into contact with the saliva of, an infected animal. Common rabid animals include bats, raccoons, skunks, and foxes¹.

Once the rabies virus enters the body, it travels to the brain and attacks the nervous system. While we usually think of rabies showing signs immediately, depending where on the body a pet is bitten it can take 3-12 weeks (sometimes longer) for clinical signs to show². However, once symptoms begin, they are sudden and noticeable³.

Signs of rabies in pets:

- Difficulty swallowing
- Ataxia (uncoordinated walking)
- Behavioral changes
- Lethargy
- Fever
- Vomiting
- Anorexia (lack of appetite)

5 lesser-known rabies facts:

1. Cats are more likely to become infected than dogs. You may think dogs are the most common domestic rabid animal, but cats are infected at a much higher rate than dogs. Since 1992, cats have been the most frequently reported rabid domestic animal (followed by dogs)⁴. This is because many cat owners do not vaccinate their cats against the disease¹.

2. Indoor-only pets can get rabies. While indoor-only pets don't have contact with wild animals like outdoor pets do, they can still come into

contact with rabid animals if one enters the home. Bats – the most common rabid animal in the United States¹ – enter homes and can bite or scratch pets.

3. Rabies virus infections in mammals are almost always deadly. Only a small percentage of animals that have rabies survive. When a suspected rabid animal goes to the vet, there are two options: euthanize or quarantine them. Even if you make the decision to quarantine your pet, there is little chance of survival – even if your pet isn't showing signs of the disease. Once a pet shows clinical signs of the disease, survival is not likely⁵.

4. There is no test for rabies in live animals. The only way to diagnose rabies is through testing of brain tissue once the animal has died or been euthanized. The only way to determine if a living animal has rabies is to quarantine them and wait for visible clinical signs to show⁵.

5. There are no treatments available for rabies. Once a pet is infected with rabies, there is no medication or treatment that your veterinarian can offer². The only way to truly save your pet from rabies is to prevent them from getting it in the first place with a vaccine.

Take preventive measures to keep your pets safe from rabies:

- **Ensure that all your pets are up-to-date on their rabies vaccination.** The first, best and easiest step is prevention - talk to your vet to make sure your pet is current on rabies vaccination.
- **Prevent contact with wildlife or unvaccinated pets.** Keep dogs on their leash and keep cats indoors.
- **Don't attract wildlife into your yard.** Keep food sources inside to prevent potentially rabid animals from coming near your pets (like raccoons, skunks, foxes, and bats).

Learn more at zoetispetcare.com

1. Rabies and My Pet. AVMA. <https://www.avma.org/public/Health/Pages/rabies.aspx>. Accessed August 2, 2019.
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3. Defensor. Zoetis United States. <https://www.zoetisus.com/products/dogs/defensor/>. Accessed August 2, 2019.
4. Rabies: what is the risk for my pet? Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/pets/>. Accessed September 9, 2016
5. Rabies Facts and Prevention Sheet. American Humane. <https://www.americanhumane.org/fact-sheet/rabies-facts-prevention-tips/>. Accessed August 2, 2019.

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