

# Rabies Facts

## What is rabies?

Rabies is a deadly viral infection that can infect humans and animals. It is nearly 100% fatal if not treated before symptoms appear.

## Who can get rabies?

Any human or mammal, including bats, skunks, raccoons, foxes, coyotes, cats, dogs, and farm animals can become infected with the rabies virus.

## How is rabies spread?

The rabies virus is spread through the saliva (spit) of an infected animal. Humans and animals can get rabies when bitten by a rabid animal or when saliva or neurologic tissue (pieces of the brain, nerves, or spinal cord) from a rabid animal enters the eyes, mouth, nose, or a break in the skin. Handling a rabid bat can lead to rabies infection because a bite may not be felt or seen.

Spreading rabies from one person to another person is extremely rare but possible if the saliva (spit) or neurologic tissue (pieces of the brain, nerves, or spinal cord) of a person with rabies comes into contact with the eyes, mouth, nose, or a break in the skin of an uninfected person.

## How can I protect myself from rabies?

You can protect yourself from rabies by avoiding contact with animals that have or might have rabies. Do not touch bats or other wildlife. If you think an animal might have rabies, please contact [Contra Costa Animal Services](#) at (925) 608-8400.

Domestic animals (pet dogs, cats, and other tame animals) can transmit rabies between wildlife and people. Rabies vaccination protects dogs from rabies infection and is required for dog licensing in Contra Costa County. For cats and other domestic animals, rabies vaccine is strongly recommended. Low-cost rabies vaccine for dogs and cats is available through [Contra Costa Animal Services](#) at (925) 608-8400.

## What should I do if I think I have been exposed to rabies?

People who are bitten by a wild or domestic animal should wash the wounds really well with soap and water as soon as possible, let their doctor know right away, contact [Contra Costa Animal Services](#) at (925) 608-8400, and contact [Contra Costa Public Health](#)

at (925) 313-6740. If a doctor has decided that rabies exposure might have happened, rabies antibodies placed around the bite and rabies vaccine in the arm will prevent the rabies disease in someone who has been bitten by a rabid animal.

People who have touched, or been touched by, a bat—or in situations when it is hard to know for sure (for example, a bat found in the room of a young child or disabled person), should wash any wounds, bites, or scratches really well with soap and water. If the bat is available for collection and rabies testing, they should contact [Contra Costa Animal Services](#) at (925) 608-8400. If not, they should see their doctor right away and contact [Contra Costa Public Health](#) at (925) 313-6740.

## **What should I do if I think my pet has been exposed to rabies?**

If a pet is bitten by another animal (wildlife or pet), or found in the presence of a bat, its owner should contact [Contra Costa Animal Services](#) at (925) 608-8400 and have any injuries checked by a veterinarian.

## **What are the symptoms of rabies?**

*A rabid animal may have symptoms such as:*

- Behavior changes, including depression and aggression
- In wildlife, loss of fear of humans or disruption of normal day/night cycle (for example, a nocturnal (night time) animal active in the daytime)
- Gait/postural changes (moving, standing, or sitting differently)
- Decreased appetite (not eating or not eating as much)
- Excessive salivation (drooling at the mouth)

*Days, weeks, or months after an untreated rabies exposure, people can develop symptoms such as:*

- Irritation, prickling or itching sensations at the site of the bite
- Fever, headache
- Confusion, anxiety, stress, and tension
- Trouble swallowing

*Prompt medical attention after a bite or bat exposure is very important because treatment can prevent rabies disease and symptoms. In both humans and animals, once the symptoms of rabies appear, death is almost certain and follows quickly. After rabies symptoms appear, there are no treatments available for humans or animals.*