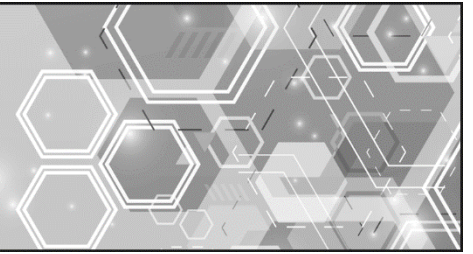




Durham Region Health Department **Facts about...**



Rabies

What is it?

Rabies is an infectious viral disease that affects the central nervous system of humans and warm blooded animals. The rabies virus travels to the brain through nerves. Once it reaches the brain, the virus reproduces and then travels back to the parts of the body through the nerves. Eventually, the virus reaches the salivary glands where it is released into the saliva in the mouth. By this time, the disease has usually damaged the brain, producing either submissive or violent behaviour. Once symptoms appear, rabies is nearly always fatal in people and animals.

How is it spread?

The most common wild species of animals associated with rabies are raccoons, skunks, bats, foxes and coyotes. Domestic animals such as cats, dogs and cattle can also get rabies if exposed to an infected animal. Rabies virus is spread from one animal to another, or from an animal to a human, through close contact with infected saliva.

Rabies is spread by infected animals/saliva through:

- bites
- contact with an open cut, sore or wound
- contact with mucous membranes (mouth, nasal cavity, eyes)
- careless handling of a dead rabid animal

What are the symptoms?

Rabies virus infects the central nervous system and ultimately causes death. Early symptoms of rabies in humans are non-specific, consisting of fever, headache and general malaise. As the disease progresses, neurological symptoms appear and may include insomnia, anxiety, confusion, slight or partial paralysis, excitation, hallucinations, agitation, hypersalivation, or difficulty swallowing. Death usually occurs within days of the onset of symptoms.

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How is it treated?

One of the most effective methods to decrease the chance for infection involves thoroughly washing the wound with soap and warm water and immediately seek medical attention. Rabies is fatal. Therefore, all bites and scratches from a suspect animal must be reported to the Health Department.

All people who are knowingly exposed to rabies should be treated immediately. Rabies treatment, known as post exposure prophylaxis (PEP), is available. This treatment usually consists of a series of injections given over 2 weeks. This treatment is safe and effective and is ordered by your physician from the Health Department.

How can I protect myself?

Be a responsible pet owner:

- Keep vaccinations up to date for all dogs, cats and ferrets. Current immunization against rabies is required by Ontario Regulation 567/90 under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act* for cats and dogs over three months of age.
- Keep your pets under direct supervision to avoid contact with wild animals.
- Call your local animal control agency to remove any stray animals from your neighborhood.
- Spay or neuter your pets to help reduce the number of unwanted pets that may not be properly cared for or regularly vaccinated.
- **Report all animal bites to the Health Department at 1-800-841-2729.**

Avoid direct contact with unfamiliar animals:

- Enjoy wild animals (raccoons, skunks, foxes, etc.) from afar. DO NOT handle, feed or unintentionally attract wild animals with open garbage cans or litter.
- Never adopt wild animals or bring them into your home. DO NOT try to nurse sick animals to health. Call your local animal control agency for assistance.
- Do not attempt to trap wild animals that are causing damage to your property. Call an animal control or wildlife removal agency for assistance.
- Teach children never to handle unfamiliar animals, wild or domestic, even if they appear friendly.
- Take measures to discourage wild animals from taking up residence in your home or on your property. For example, cover up potential entrances, such as uncapped chimneys, loose shingles and openings in attics, roofs and eaves.
- Do not touch dead or sick animals. Bury or dispose of dead animals carefully and ensure your pets are not exposed to the carcasses. Use a barrier such as heavy gloves or shovel when handling dead animals.
- Prevent bats from entering living quarters or occupied spaces in homes, churches, schools and other similar areas where they might come in contact with people and pets.
- When travelling abroad, avoid contact with wild animals and be especially careful around dogs in developing countries.
- Wash any wound from an animal thoroughly with soap and water and seek medical attention immediately.

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