



BRISTOL-BURLINGTON HEALTH DISTRICT
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RABIES

What is rabies?

Rabies is a serious disease caused by a virus that attacks the central nervous system.

Where is the virus found?

The virus is found in many wild and domestic mammals including bats, raccoons, skunks, and unvaccinated dogs and cats. Note: The Health District has had several positive cases in skunks this past month (Sept. 2011). It can be transmitted from infected mammals to humans.

How is rabies spread?

Rabies is usually spread through a bite from an infected animal; however, on rare occasions, it can be spread in an open wound or in the eye or mouth.

Who gets rabies?

All warm blooded mammals including humans can get rabies. Birds, fish and reptiles can not.

What are the symptoms of rabies?

Early symptoms include irritability, headache, fever and sometimes itching or pain at the site of exposure. The disease eventually progresses to paralysis, spasms of the throat muscles, convulsions, delirium and death. Once clinical signs of rabies appear, the disease is fatal. However, disease can be prevented by thorough wound cleaning and *timely* medical treatment.

What is the treatment for rabies?

IF YOU HAVE BEEN BITTEN BY AN ANIMAL WHO MIGHT BE INFECTED - *DO NOT PANIC, BUT DON'T IGNORE THE BITE EITHER.* Treatment requires prompt washing of the bite site, followed by the administration of the rabies vaccine. Note: the vaccine dosing schedule has recently been reduced from five to four. The first dose of the 4-dose course should be administered as soon as possible after exposure (day 0). Additional doses should be given on days 3, 7, and 14 after exposure.

Is rabies preventable?

If preventive treatment is obtained promptly following a rabies exposure, most cases of rabies will be prevented. However, untreated cases may result in death. Vaccination of domestic animals is an important part of rabies prevention programs. Note: The Health District coordinates a Rabies Clinic each spring for dogs and cats.

Since rabid animals have been found in our area, please remember to: Avoid contact with wild or stray animals – do not feed, pet or handle them. Report all unusual behaviors of wild animals such as lack of coordination, seizures, or aggression to an animal control officer. Make sure your pets and livestock are properly immunized and confine them, especially at night when wild animals are more active. Report all domestic animal encounters with wild animals to an animal control officer or the pet's veterinarian for advice and treatment. If you are bitten by an animal, wash the wound well with soap and warm water and contact your health care provider.

