

What is rabies and how is it transmitted?

Rabies is an acutely infectious viral disease that affects the nervous system of humans and other mammals. People get rabies from the bite of a rabid animal. Any wild mammal, like a bat, skunk, or fox can have rabies and transmit it to people. It is also possible, but quite rare, that people may get rabies if infectious material from a rabid animal, such as saliva, gets directly into their eyes, nose, mouth, or a wound. Because rabies is a fatal disease, the goal of public health is, first, to prevent human exposure to rabies by education and, second, to prevent the disease by anti-rabies treatment if exposure occurs. Thousands of people are successfully treated each year after being bitten by an animal that may have rabies. A few people die of rabies each year in the United States, usually because they do not recognize the risk of rabies from the bite of a wild animal and do not promptly seek medical advice. Bat contact is one of the highest-risks for rabies, especially when people, or their pets are exposed; think their incidental contact was so slight that there is not a problem.

Why should I know about rabies?

Rabies is a fatal disease if not treated at the time of exposure. Most of the recent human rabies cases have been caused by rabies virus acquired from bats. Awareness of the facts about rabies can help people protect themselves, their families, and their pets. This information may also help clear up misunderstandings about the rabies risk in our area.

In California from 1996 to 2005 rabies has been detected in 2,941 animals, with 5 fatal human cases. Bats are the leader with 1,600 cases, and skunks are slightly behind with 1,239 cases. The next closest runner-up is the fox with 48 cases, and dogs and cats are tied with 18 cases each. During this same time period 194 rabid animals were detected in Alameda County (134 bats, 56 skunks, 2 foxes, and two opossums).

Alameda County is a “declared rabies area” and rabies vaccination is mandatory for dogs over 4 months old. Vaccination helps protect your pet, and reduce the rabies exposure potential to you, your family, and neighbors. If your dog, or cat is involved

in a bite to a human or other animal, state law mandates “rabies quarantine” (isolation from people or animals) for the biting animal. An unvaccinated dog, or cat that has contact with a biting animal that is subject to rabies, and that is not apprehended for quarantine or testing, will have to be vaccinated, and undergo a six-month quarantine. Vaccinated dogs or cats will have to be re-vaccinated, and monitored for 30 days in quarantine. For the above reasons, having up-to-date rabies vaccination is very important to you, your family, and your pet. A six month quarantine is a long time for a dog or cat to be isolated.

Quarantine Periods:

Scenario: *Your currently vaccinated dog (over 4 months of age), or cat is involved in a biting, or scratching incident.*

- Must be placed in “quarantine” for a 10 day period of time.
- Avoiding, concealing information, or violating this quarantine order is a misdemeanor.
- The only variation is when the involved animal (cat or dog) is held in strict isolated quarantine, under observation by a licensed veterinarian for 5 days. On the fifth day after the biting incident, upon thorough examination, the pet may be released with a certification from the veterinarian that the animal has no clinical signs of rabies.
- Release from quarantine must be done by the Health Officer or their representative.

Scenario: *Your vaccinated dog or cat comes into contact with any rabid animal, clinically suspected rabid animal, or biting wild animal shall be isolated in strict confinement as follows:*

- This type of exposure requires a 30-day quarantine of the dog or cat! It is always a good idea to not allow your pets to have contact with wild animals, especially those subject to rabies.
- Pets must be re-vaccinated after the exposure.

Scenario: *If your unvaccinated dog, cat, or dog under 4 months of age, comes into contact with an animal that is rabid, susceptible to rabies, or suspect of being potentially infected with rabies.*

- This type of exposure requires a six-month quarantine.
- Pets must be vaccinated after the exposure.

Isolation, what does this mean?

In officially declared rabies areas (see Section 121585, California Health and Safety Code) the isolation described in paragraph (2) shall be mandatory for any animal of a species subject to rabies that has bitten or otherwise exposed a person, with the exception of rodents (members of the order Rodentia) and rabbits and hares (members of the order Lagomorpha).

Any rabid animal or clinically suspect rabid animal, or animals exposed to suspect animals, shall be isolated in strict confinement under proper care and under the observation of a licensed veterinarian, in a pound, veterinary hospital, or other adequate facility in a manner approved by the local health officer, except where such responsibility has been delegated to a comparable officer by the governing body, and shall not be killed or released for at least 10 days after the bite, or after the onset of symptoms suggestive of rabies, with the exception that such animals may be sacrificed with permission of the local health officer for the purpose of laboratory examination for rabies using the fluorescent rabies antibody (FRA) test in an approved public health laboratory.

What if I have a bat, or bats in my house?

Protect yourself and follow these steps when you need to capture a bat in your home:

- Close the windows, closet doors, and the door to the room.
- Turn on the lights if the room is dark, and wait for the bat to land.
- Wear thick gloves and cover the bat with a coffee can or other non-flexible container.
- Slide a piece of cardboard under the can, trapping the bat.
- Tape the cardboard tightly to the can.
- Immediately contact Vector Control, or, your local animal control agency.

Any live, dead, or killed bat that may have had contact with a person or pet should be tested for rabies. If the test results are positive for rabies, or the bat cannot be found, or has escaped, seek professional advice as soon as possible.

What can I do to prevent rabies?

- Vaccinate your pets! Cats, dogs, and ferrets all need to be vaccinated by a veterinarian regularly. If you own livestock, make sure their vaccinations are up-to-date.
- Do not feed or handle wild animals, or stray dogs, or cats. Teach children that although a baby skunk, or opossum may look cute, and friendly, it can be very dangerous.
- Use garbage containers with tight fitting lids. Do not leave pet food outside where it can attract wild animals.
- Do not keep wild animals as pets. Not only is this dangerous for you and the animal, it is also against the law.
- Do not touch or pick up dead animals.
- Avoid contact with bats, and leave them alone.
- Never handle a bat especially with bare hands. If you need to handle a bat, use thick gloves, tongs, or a shovel to remove a dead bat, or call in bat removal experts.
- Do not crush the bat because you want it to be in good condition for rabies testing.
- Do not let your pet play with bats!
- Keep bats out of the house or other buildings by closing or covering the attic or other dark sheltered areas.
- Put screens on the windows.

What should I do if my pet or I am exposed to an animal that might have rabies?

If you have been bitten, scratched, or exposed to an animal's saliva:

- Immediately wash the wound right away with soap and water for ten minutes.
- Call your doctor or a hospital emergency room.
- Get a description of the animal that bit or scratched you.

- Call your local animal control, or vector control for assistance. The animal that bit or scratched you may have to be tested for rabies or quarantined.

If your pet has been bitten, scratched, or exposed to an animal's saliva:

- Try to find out what type of animal bit or scratched your pet. *Do not touch the attacking animal!*
- Use gloves or a hose to cleanse your pet's wound. Do not touch your pet with your bare hands. There may be saliva from the attacking animal still on your pet, even if you do not see a bite or wound.
- Call your veterinarian.
- Call your local animal control officer, or vector control to report the incident.

For people who are bitten or scratched by a rabid animal, prompt treatment will protect the person from getting rabies. Treatment usually involves a total of five shots of safe and effective rabies vaccine. The injections are usually given in the arm, and given over several days, with one shot of another medication called Human Rabies Immune Globulin (HRIG) given immediately.



For more information contact:

**Alameda County Vector Control Services District
1131 Harbor Bay Pkwy., STE 166
Alameda, CA 94502**

Phone: (510) 567-6800

Web: <http://www.acvcgsd.org>

Rabies in Alameda County

