

## **Rabies**

Rabies is the most infamous disease that can be passed from animals to people. It has been the subject of so many novels and movies that it can be difficult to separate fact from fiction. Knowing the truth about rabies can help you protect your dog and your family from this deadly disease.

### **What is Rabies?**

Rabies is caused by a virus that attacks the nervous system. It infects all warm-blooded animals, including people and is almost always fatal. In the United States, human cases of rabies are rare, only a few each year. The risk is still present though, since rabid animals are found in most states.

### **How Is It Spread?**

More than 90% of reported cases of rabies today in the U.S. occur in wild animals. The species most likely to carry rabies include raccoons, skunks, foxes, bats, and coyotes. Even though rats have been targeted as a major source of rabies in fictional stories, they are actually very unlikely to harbor the disease. The number of cases in domestic animals is small but still represents a significant risk, since people are more likely to come into physical contact with them. Rabies is usually transmitted via the saliva as a result of a bite from an infected animal. The virus enters the nerves near the site of infection, and travels through the nervous system to the brain over a period of weeks or months. Symptoms occur once the virus reaches the brain. This is also the time when the saliva becomes infectious.

### **Rabies in Animals**

Animals with rabies often exhibit behavioral changes. Wild animals may act friendly, groggy or unafraid of people. Pets may act fearful or agitated. Other symptoms include excessive salivation, difficulty swallowing, lack of coordination, and paralysis. The only accurate tests for rabies in animals are performed postmortem. Animals suspected of rabies are euthanized rather than treated, because there is no cure.

### **Rabies in People**

The symptoms of rabies in people are similar to those in animals. People with rabies are kept as comfortable as possible in the hospital, but there is no effective treatment for the disease.

### **Rabies Prevention**

Fortunately, this terrible disease can be prevented. Here are some of the ways you, your family, and your dog can stay safe:

- Vaccinate your pets regularly, even if they live indoors. Vaccines are available for dogs, cats, ferrets, and horses. Vaccinated pets act as a buffer zone between rabid animals and you. If your unvaccinated pet bites someone or is bitten by a wild animal, he may be subject to a lengthy and costly quarantine.

Animal Care Veterinary Hospital  
502 McMillan Lane  
Greenville, NC 27834  
252-758-9971

- Help minimize the stray animal problem in your community. Have all of your pets spayed and neutered. Call your local animal control agency to remove strays in your neighborhood.
- Avoid contact with wild animals. Do not feed wildlife or allow your dog to chase or hunt wild animals. Keep garbage and pet food inside or in secure containers. Never try to keep a wild animal as a pet, or nurse a sick one back to health. Instead, contact a wildlife rescue agency for assistance.
- If your dog is bitten by a wild animal, seek veterinary care right away.
- If you are bitten by a wild animal or an unvaccinated pet, wash the area thoroughly with soap and water. Seek medical attention immediately. Be able to provide your doctor with the location of the incident, the type of animal that bit you, how the bite occurred, and whether the animal has been captured. Treatment immediately after exposure is extremely effective. Don't be scared away by horror stories about countless shots in the stomach. The current procedure is much less unpleasant than it used to be, and is certainly preferable to risking the disease.

