



**CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH
DIVISION OF DISEASE CONTROL**

RABIES

What is rabies?

Rabies is a viral disease affecting the central nervous system. It is transmitted from infected mammals to man, and is always fatal once symptoms appear. Fortunately, only a few human cases are reported each year in the United States.

Who gets rabies?

All warm-blooded mammals, including man, are susceptible to rabies. The last human case of rabies in Philadelphia occurred in 1938. However, in recent years, rabies has been confirmed in many different animal species in Philadelphia, including raccoons, bats, skunks, groundhogs, cats, and foxes.

What are the symptoms of rabies?

Early symptoms include irritability, headache, fever and sometimes itching or tingling pain at the site of exposure. The disease eventually progresses to paralysis; spasms of the throat muscles, convulsions, delirium and death.

How soon after infection do symptoms appear?

The incubation period (the period between exposure and the development of symptoms) in human cases is variable but is normally 3 to 8 weeks. Incubation periods shorter than 3 weeks and more than 8 weeks have also occurred. Incubation periods up to several years have been reported. Persons with possible rabies exposure should seek preventive treatment immediately. Once symptoms of the disease begin, rabies is invariably fatal.

When and for how long is a person able to spread rabies?

Person to person transmission is extremely rare; however, precautions should be taken to prevent exposure to the saliva of the diseased person.

What is the preventive treatment for a potential rabies exposure (e.g., animal bite or scratch)?

Preventive treatment requires prompt scrubbing of the bite or scratch site with soap and copious amounts of water, followed by the administration of rabies immune globulin (dosage depending on weight) and five doses of human diploid cell rabies vaccine administered into the arm muscle on days 0, 3, 7, 14 and 28 after exposure.

What happens if rabies exposure goes untreated?

Exposure of a person to a rabid animal does not always result in rabies. If preventive treatment is obtained promptly following a rabies exposure, most cases of rabies will be prevented. Untreated cases will always result in death.

How can rabies be prevented?

Exposure to rabies may be minimized by avoiding contact with bats and staying away from all wild and stray animals, especially those acting abnormally. It is also important to have domestic animals (dogs, cats, and ferrets) vaccinated against rabies.

For more information or animal control issues visit the [animal control web page](#).