



FACT SHEET

Rabies Prevention

What is rabies?

- Rabies is a disease caused by the rabies virus. People start to show signs of the disease 1 to 3 months or longer after being bitten by an animal carrying the rabies virus.
- The early signs of rabies can be fever or headache, but this changes quickly to central nervous system signs, such as confusion, sleepiness or agitation.
- Once someone with rabies is infected starts having these symptoms, that person usually dies within weeks. **It is very important to talk to your doctor or health care provider right away if any animal bites you, especially a wild animal.** This is because there is effective treatment to prevent rabies, as long as the treatment is given in time. Your doctor will consult with Public Health specialist and decide if you require treatment.

Can animals transmit rabies to me?

- Yes, many kinds of animals can pass rabies to people. Wild animals are much more likely than domestic animals to carry rabies, especially bats, raccoons, skunks, foxes, and coyotes.
- Bats especially are of concern as rabies carriers in this part of the country. However dogs, cats, cows or any warm-blooded animal can pass rabies to people.
- People usually get rabies from the bite of an infected animal, or from other forms of contact with the animal's saliva.
- Some animals, such as dogs and cats, can be vaccinated against rabies, but you should always wash any bite thoroughly and check with your health care provider about what to do if any animal bites you.

How can I protect myself from getting rabies?

Be a responsible pet owner:

- Keep rabies vaccinations up to date for all dogs, cats, and ferrets. This is important not only to keep your pet from getting rabies, but also to provide a barrier of protection for you, if your animal is bitten by a rabid animal such as a bat. El Paso County regulations require that all dogs, cats, and ferrets be vaccinated for rabies by 4 months of age and booster shots be kept current.
- Keep your pets under direct supervision so they do not come in contact with wild animals. If your pet is bitten by a wild animal, seek veterinary assistance for the animal immediately and call Animal Services for further advice.
- Call your local animal control agency (915-842-1000) to remove any stray animals from your neighborhood. They may be unvaccinated and could be infected with rabies.
- Spay or neuter your pets to help reduce the number of unwanted pets that may not be properly cared for or regularly vaccinated.

Avoid contact with unfamiliar animals:

- Enjoy wild animals like bats, raccoons, skunks, foxes, and coyotes from afar. **Do not** handle, feed, or intentionally attract wild animals with open garbage cans, uncovered compost bins, or pet food left outside.
- **Never** adopt wild animals or bring them into your home. Do not try to nurse sick animals back to health. Call animal control, an animal rescue agency.
- Teach children **never** to handle unfamiliar animals, wild or domestic, even if they appear to be friendly. ***"Love your own, leave other animals alone"*** is a good principle for children to learn.

- Prevent bats from entering homes or occupied spaces in churches, schools, and other similar areas where they might come in contact with people and pets. **If a person or pet has had any exposure to a bat, including finding a bat in the house, it is very important to call Animal Services (915-842-1000) for advice.**
- When traveling abroad, avoid contact with wild animals and be especially careful around dogs in developing countries. Rabies is common in parts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America where many dogs are infected with rabies. Tens of thousands of people die of

rabies each year in these countries. Before traveling abroad, consult with your health care provider, travel clinic, or your health department about your risk of exposure to rabies, if you should be immunized against rabies before you go, and how you should handle an animal exposure, should it arise.

Report all cases to El Paso Department of Public Health by calling 915-842-1000.