Everyday Safety

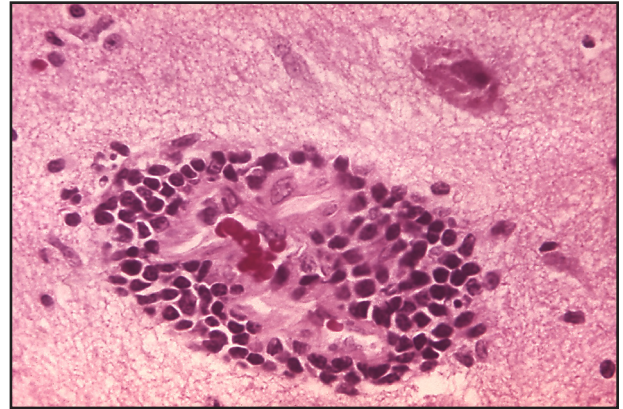*Tailgate Talks*

Rabies

This Everyday Safety Tailgate Talk was created using information from the Washington County, New York County Safety Office, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Mayo Clinic, and the Washington State Department of Health

Rabies is a viral disease that causes brain inflammation in humans and other mammals. It is spread through bites or scratches from infected animals. It can also be transmitted if the infected saliva comes into contact with your eyes, mouth, or nose. Once symptoms appear, the result is almost always death. Symptoms can appear 1 to 3 months after exposure. All warm-blooded mammals including humans are susceptible to rabies.

PREVENTION

- Don't approach wild animals. Wild animals with rabies may seem unafraid of people. It's not normal for a wild animal to be friendly with people, so stay away from any animal that seems unafraid.

- Contact Public Health or your local animal control if you think an animal (wild or domestic) may be sick or if you have been bit by one.

    - Animals with rabies may show a variety of signs, including fearfulness, aggression, excessive drooling, difficulty swallowing, staggering, paralysis and seizures. Rabid wild animals may lose their natural fear of humans, and display unusual behavior; for example, an animal that is usually only seen at night may be seen wandering in the daytime.

- Report stray animals to local authorities. Call your local animal control officials or other local law enforcement to report stray dogs and cats.

- Vaccinate your pets

- If working in areas where a high prevalence of rabies has been reported, workers could consider seeking a preventative vaccination from healthcare professionals.

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EXPOSURE

What should I do if an animal bites me?

Clean the site of any animal bite with soap and water. Contact your health care provider and local health department to determine the potential for rabies exposure, the need for treatment, and to decide whether or not to test the animal for rabies.
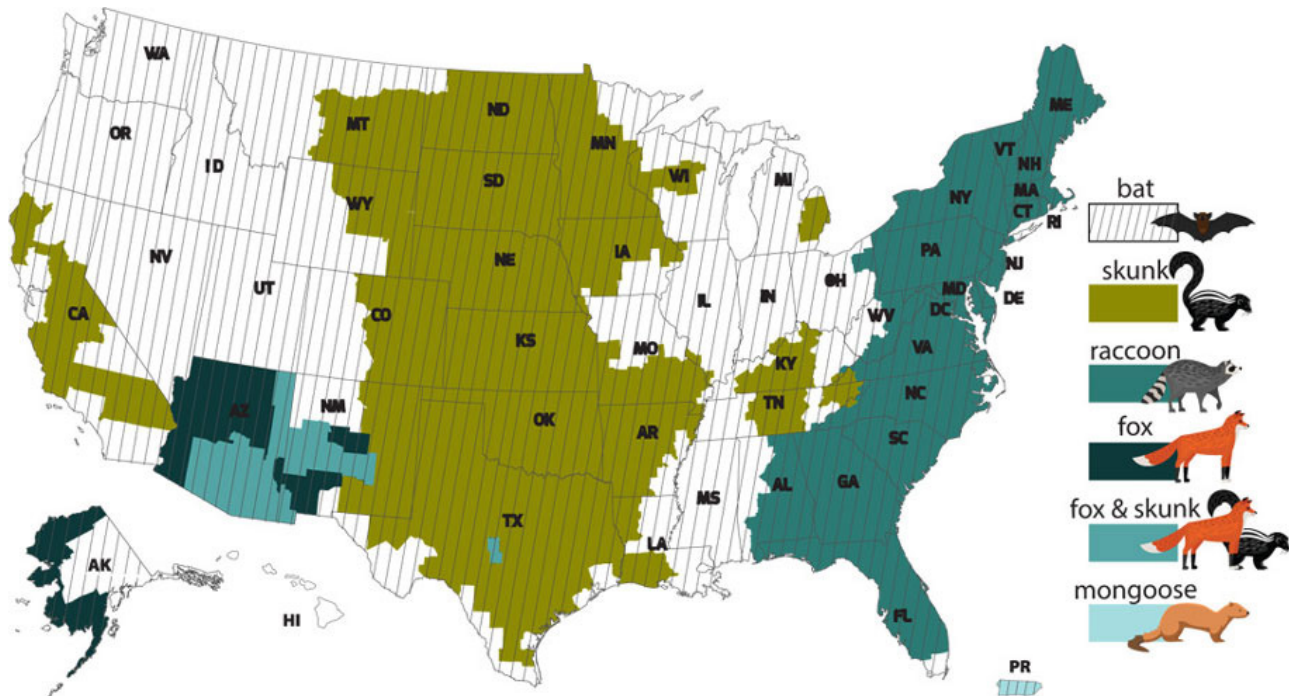
What are the symptoms?

Symptoms normally appear two to eight weeks after exposure, but the incubation period may vary. Early symptoms include headache, fever, and sometimes pain at the site of the exposure (bite). The disease rapidly progresses into a severe nervous system (neurologic) illness. Symptoms may include agitation, confusion, paralysis, and difficulty swallowing. Most patients die within a few days or weeks of onset.

What treatment is available after exposure to rabies occurs?

Rabies in humans is 100% preventable through prompt appropriate medical care. Safe and effective treatment following potential rabies exposure should begin as soon as possible after the exposure occurs. Treatment is a series of shots. These shots, called post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), include one dose of human rabies immunoglobulin (HRIG) and four doses of rabies vaccine given on a specific schedule over a 14-day period. People with weak immune systems will also need a fifth dose of vaccine and a blood test to check that the vaccine worked.

PREVALENCE

Wild animals accounted for 92.7% of reported cases of rabies in 2018. Bats were the most frequently reported rabid wildlife species (33% of all animal cases during 2018), followed by raccoons (30.3%), skunks (20.3%), and foxes (7.2%).

CDC Map showing most commonly rabid wild animal by region in the US.

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Resources:

Mayo Clinic Rabies Informational Webpage
https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/rabies/symptoms-causes/syc-20351821

Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Rabies Webpage
https://www.cdc.gov/rabies/index.html

World Health Organization (WHO) Rabies Fact Sheet Webpage
https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/rabies

American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Rabies and Your Pet Webpage
https://www.avma.org/resources/public-health/rabies-and-your-pet

Washing State Health Department
https://www.doh.wa.gov/youandyourfamily/illnessanddisease/rabies

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