



# Rabies Vaccination

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## GEORGIA LAW

Only five states have fewer rabies cases than Georgia (N.Y., Pa., Tex., Fla., and Ca.) Over 1100 people are treated for rabies annually in Georgia with raccoons being the most dangerous exposure possibility.

The requirements for rabies vaccinations vary from state to state. If you live in Georgia, you do not have a choice whether to vaccinate or not - it's the law (Rabies Control Law, O.C.G.A §31-19). Decisions about frequency of inoculations, fees and other procedures are left to local County Boards of Health. (O.C.G.A. §31-19-5). The law requires that "...all owned dogs and cats be vaccinated against rabies by a licensed veterinarian using approved vaccines in accordance with the national **Compendium of Animal Rabies Prevention and Control.**" Even though the Compendium recommends re-vaccination every 1-3 years, local jurisdictions may require inoculations every year. (**Compendium**, Part II B). Because there is no licensed vaccine that can be used on wild animals, Georgia does not allow ownership of wild animals or wild-animal hybrids as pets. (O.C.G.A. §27-5-5). Dogs, cats and ferrets being imported into the state, must be vaccinated at 12 weeks in accordance with the **Compendium**. Any person bitten and any owner of any animal which has been bitten or shows signs of rabies must notify the County Board of Health immediately and the animal must be confined if possible. (O.C.G.A. §31-19-4).

Rabies vaccinations are offered at considerable discounts at clinics on Saturdays during April, May or June. Check with your local environmental health office, veterinary clinic or other sponsoring organization for specific dates, times and locations. If you think you, your pets or livestock may have been exposed to rabies, you can get information and guidance from your county health department, veterinarian, county animal control or the Georgia Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222. Additional information on rabies exposure can be found on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at **[www.cdc.gov/rabies](http://www.cdc.gov/rabies)**.

## **BACKGROUND**

Rabies is one of the oldest communicable diseases known to man. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that more than 35,000 people each year die from rabies worldwide, and more than ten million people are infected with the virus annually. Less than 10,000 cases of animal rabies occur in the U.S. yearly, with only 1000 cases reported in domestic animals. Hawaii is the only state that has no reported cases of rabies.

Because rabies is potentially a fatal disease, prevention is of paramount importance to health care professionals. Humans usually acquire the disease from the saliva of a bite from a wild animal infected with the virus. Public health measures are critical to its control because one third of all rabies bites are to children. Even though only 34 cases (CDC) have been diagnosed in the U.S. between 2003 and 2013, the virus can affect the central nervous system causing encephalomyelitis (inflammation of the brain), which is almost always fatal. Therefore, immunization of all domestic animals is critical to prevent rabies infection from spreading to people.

## **INFECTED ANIMALS**

In the nineteenth century, Louis Pasteur developed the vaccine that prevented rabies infection in animals, and with proper post-exposure prophylaxis, in humans. Today, the prevalence of rabies in a specific location depends on how effective immunization and animal control programs are in that location.

Due to the large number of unvaccinated strays contacting mammals in the wild, cats are the most common domesticated animal reported with rabies. Less than 5% of rabies cases occur in domesticated dogs, but unvaccinated dogs can be a method of transmission from undomesticated canines such as coyotes, wolves, jackals, and foxes. Terrestrial rabies in the U.S. is most commonly transmitted from raccoons, skunks and groundhogs. Smaller rodents such as squirrels, chipmunks, rats, mice, rabbits and hares usually die before being able to transmit the disease to humans. Possums have a low body temperature and therefore, rarely can carry the rabies virus. Since 1990, two thirds of the fifty rabies deaths in the U.S. have been caused by bats (avian rabies). At least 30 of the 39 species of bats have been reported as rabid at some time. Most bat bites are to children who may not be aware that they were bitten. If possible, any wild animal that bites a human should be caught and tested to prevent the need for rabies immunization (prophylaxis) that is a painful, expensive and lengthy process usually consisting of four or five shots over a 14 to 28 day period.

## REFERENCES

<http://www.examiner-enterprise.com/> "Two-thirds of rabies deaths in US attributed to bat exposure"

[www.emedicine.medscape.com](http://www.emedicine.medscape.com) (Rabies Epidemiology)

[www.dph.georgia.gov](http://www.dph.georgia.gov) (ADES\_Rabies\_Man)

[www.who.int/rabies/human/](http://www.who.int/rabies/human/)

[www.avma.org/Advocacy/StateAndLocal/Pages/rabies-vaccination.aspx](http://www.avma.org/Advocacy/StateAndLocal/Pages/rabies-vaccination.aspx)

[www.uptodate.com/contents/when-to-use-rabies-prophylaxis](http://www.uptodate.com/contents/when-to-use-rabies-prophylaxis)

[www.cdc.gov/rabies/](http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/)

**Compendium of Animal Rabies Prevention and Control**

**Georgia Rabies Control Manual**

## APPENDIX A

**O.C.G.A. §31-19-5** (2010) Inoculation of canines and felines against rabies:

The county boards of health are empowered and required to adopt and promulgate rules and regulations requiring canines and felines to be inoculated against rabies and to prescribe the intervals and means of inoculation, the fees to be paid in county sponsored clinics, that procedures be in compliance with the recommendations of the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians for identifying inoculated canines and felines, and all other procedures applicable thereto. As used in this chapter, the term "inoculation against rabies" means the administering by a licensed veterinarian of anti-rabies vaccine approved by the department.

*Credit to Kaye Klapper*

