

## UNDERSTANDING FELINE RABIES

Rabies is a viral illness affecting the brain and spinal cord. All mammals are susceptible to this disease.

Rabies is most often spread when an infected animal bites a person or another animal. However, it's possible to contract rabies from more casual exposure, including being scratched or having contact with an infected animal's saliva in an open cut or wound. Once symptoms appear, there is no cure for the disease and it is almost always fatal. However, if a person is bitten by a rabid animal and is not yet experiencing symptoms, an effective post-exposure treatment is available consisting of one dose of Rabies Immune Globulin and five doses of the rabies vaccine over a 28-day period.

The rabies virus is transmitted via the saliva or mucous membranes of an infected animal. Dogs and cats are the most commonly infected domestic animals, while bats, skunks, coyotes, raccoons, and foxes are the most commonly infected wild animals. In the United States, rabies is reported in cats more often than any other domestic species. Each year, rabies is responsible for the deaths of more than 50,000 people and millions of animals worldwide.

Once the rabies virus enters the body, it moves along the nerve pathways to the brain. This process can occur over a matter of days, weeks, or even months, though three months is the average time from exposure to symptoms.

Signs of rabies in cats include sudden changes in behavior or temperament, aggression, restlessness, lethargy, excitability, apprehension, or confusion. As the disease progresses, a kitty may demonstrate increased vocalization, a tendency to roam, weakness or disorientation, loss of appetite, or fever. It's not uncommon for the cat to become vicious. The cat may begin drooling excessively or have trouble swallowing. Paralysis of the lower jaw may occur which often spreads to lower extremities. Seizures, tremors, or convulsions may also occur.

If a suspected rabid animal bites a person, the animal will be quarantined for a period of time specified by local ordinances. If during the quarantine period the animal develops signs of rabies, this is considered a public safety threat and, sadly, euthanasia is mandatory. The animal's tissues will then be sent to a laboratory for analysis and confirmation of rabies infection.

How do you protect your kitty from rabies? A simple annual vaccination is an effective way to guard your cat against this preventable disease. Although unvaccinated animals who roam outdoors are at the highest risk for contracting rabies, even indoor-only pets should be protected from potential exposure to this deadly disease. In Sacramento County, rabies vaccinations are required by law. County Code 8.24.030/8.25.030 requires that all dogs and cats over four months of age be vaccinated against rabies.

If you believe your pet may have been exposed to rabies, it's critical that you immediately contact your veterinarian and also report it to your local animal

control authorities. Even if your kitty is current on their rabies vaccination, he or she should immediately be given a rabies booster vaccine if bitten by a potentially rabid animal, then kept under observation for 45 days.

At the Sacramento Cat Hospital, we use only PUREVAX non-adjuvanted vaccines. Many vaccines are adjuvanted, which means they contain an additive to help the cat's body develop immunity. Unfortunately, adjuvanted vaccines have been shown to cause inflammation or even cancerous tumors at the injection site. Please ask to speak with one of our doctors if you'd like to discuss this in more detail.

In addition to vaccinating your pets, what else can you do to help protect yourself and your furry family members from rabid animals in your neighborhood? Don't leave garbage or pet food outside where it may attract stray or wild animals. While enjoying the great outdoors, always keep a safe distance from wild animals. And if you see a wild or stray animal acting strangely or aggressively, immediately contact your local animal control authorities.



For additional information about feline rabies, please speak with one of our doctors.