



BRISTOL-BURLINGTON HEALTH DISTRICT

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Rabies - Fact Sheet

What is rabies?

Rabies is a serious disease caused by a virus that attacks the central nervous system. It is transmitted from infected mammals to humans.

Where is the virus found?

The virus is found in many wild and domestic mammals including bats, raccoons, skunks, and unvaccinated dogs and cats.

How is rabies spread?

Rabies is usually spread through a bite from an infected animal; however, on rare occasions, it can be spread in an open wound or in the eye or mouth.

Who gets rabies?

All warm blooded mammals including humans can get rabies. Birds, fish and reptiles can not.

What are the symptoms of rabies?

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

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

The incubation period is variable but is normally two to eight weeks. Incubation periods of over one year have been reported.

What is the treatment for rabies?

IF YOU HAVE BEEN BITTEN BY AN ANIMAL WHO MIGHT BE INFECTED - *DO NOT PANIC, BUT DON'T IGNORE THE BITE EITHER.* Treatment requires prompt washing of the bite site, followed by the administration of rabies immune globulin (dosage dependent on weight) and five doses of human diploid cell rabies vaccine administered in the arm on days 0, 3, 7, 14, and 28 after exposure.

What happens if rabies exposure goes untreated?

Exposure of humans 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 result in death.

Can bats carry rabies?

Yes, most of the recent human rabies cases in the United States have been caused by the rabies virus from bats.

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How can I tell if a bat has rabies?

Rabies can only be confirmed by a laboratory. However, any bat that is active by day, is found in a place where bats are not usually seen (for example, in your home or on the lawn) or is unable to fly is far more likely than others to be rabid. Such bats are often the most easily approached. Therefore, it is best never to handle a bat.

What should I do if I come into contact with a bat?

If you are bitten by a bat – or if infectious material (such as saliva) from a bat gets into your eyes, nose, mouth or a wound – wash the affected area thoroughly and get medical advice immediately. Whenever possible the bat should be captured and sent to a laboratory for testing.

People usually know when they have been bitten by a bat. However, because bats have small teeth which may leave marks that are not easily seen, there are situations where you should seek medical advice even in the absence of an obvious bite wound. For example if you awaken to find a bat in your room, see a bat in the room of an unattended child, or see a bat near a mentally impaired or intoxicated person, seek medical advice and have the bat tested.

People cannot get rabies just from seeing a bat in an attic, cave, or at a distance. In addition, it is not possible to contract rabies by coming in contact with bat droppings, blood, or urine, or from touching a bat on its fur (even though bats should never be handled).

How can I safely capture a bat in my apartment?

If a bat is present in your apartment and you cannot rule out the possibility of exposure, leave the animal alone and contact the **Bristol Animal Control Officer at 860-584-3087** for assistance. If professional help is not immediately available, use precautions to capture the bat safely, as described below:

When the bat lands, approach it slowly, while wearing leather work gloves and place a box or coffee can over it, slide a piece of cardboard under the container to trap the bat inside. Tape the cardboard to the container securely, and punch small holes in the cardboard, allowing the bat to breathe. Contact the Bristol Animal Control to make arrangements for follow up.

If you see a bat in your apartment and you are sure no human or pet exposure has occurred, confine the bat to a room by closing all doors and windows leading out of the room except those to the outside. The bat will probably leave soon. If not, it can be caught, as described and released outdoors away from people and pets. Do not let the bat out into the main hallway of the apartment building.

For additional information on this disease, please call the **Bristol-Burlington Health District (860-584-7682)**. Additional information can also be found on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov/rabies) website.

This fact sheet is for informational purposes only. It should not be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. If you think that you may have been exposed to a rabid animal, or have questions about the disease described above, you should consult your health care provider.