

RABIES Q'S & A'S UNCOVERED

Q: Who can become infected with rabies?

A: Only mammals can become infected with the rabies virus. A **virus** is a very tiny germ that can't be seen with the human eye. **Mammals** are warm-blooded animals that give birth to live young, have hair or fur on their bodies and nurse from their mothers (foxes, skunks, squirrels, dogs, cats humans, etc.). Make it clear that if only mammals can become infected with the rabies virus, then that means the animals in the non-mammal group cannot become infected with rabies (snakes, turtles, birds, fish, etc.).

Q: Which animals are at a higher risk of getting rabies?

A: Humans and **domestic** animals account for a very small percentage of those who become infected with the disease. 93 out of 100 reported cases of rabies are found in **wild** animals.

Wild animals, such as raccoons, squirrels, wolves, and foxes live in their natural habitat and can survive without the help of humans. Actually, they are better off and happier left alone and can raise their own young, find their own food and have ways of protecting themselves.

Domestic animals, such as cats, dogs, hamsters and other common pets are those that humans have taken into their homes as pets. These animals can no longer take care of themselves and depend on humans to survive.

Q: How is the rabies virus spread?

A: Rabies is spread in an infected animal's saliva. **Saliva** is the natural liquid that forms in your mouth like spit. If an animal that is infected with rabies bites another animal or human then the disease is spread to that animal. The animal can carry the virus for 3-12 weeks without showing any signs of being sick. The infected animal will eventually begin showing signs of sickness like:

1. Problems swallowing
2. Increased Drooling
3. Aggression
4. General sickness
5. Change in behavior (a usually friendly pet may try to bite and wild animals may move around slowly and allow humans and other animals to get near them)

You cannot get rabies from contact with animal blood or by petting an animal. If a cat with rabies licks her paw and then scratches you then you can become infected with rabies. **REMEMBER:** It is spread only through saliva.

Q: Can the rabies virus be prevented?

A: Absolutely! You can stop the spread of rabies by doing all of these things:

1. Take your pets to the veterinarian once a year to get a rabies vaccination or shot.
2. Don't leave pets outdoors where they may come in contact with infected wild animals.
3. Keep your pets on a leash so you can make sure they don't have close contact with wild animals.
4. Keep lids on your trashcans so wild animals aren't attracted to your home.
5. **DO NOT** approach wild animals or try to touch them! Enjoy wild animals from afar. Tell an adult and contact your local animal control officer if you find a stray or wild animal that appears sick or injured. Try to remember the address so the officer can find the animal.
6. If you are bitten by any animal, quickly wash the bite area with soap and warm water for at least five minutes, tell an adult immediately and call your doctor! Call an animal control officer and give him/her a description of the animal and its location so he/she can find it.
7. If your pet is bitten by an animal, tell an adult and call your veterinarian immediately even if your pet is up to date on all his shots.