

## Rabies: Understanding this still-active disease

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Any warm-blooded animal (including humans) can contract rabies. There is no treatment for rabies, and the instances of unvaccinated dogs surviving the infection are rare.

The good news is that for dogs, the risk of coming into contact with the virus is low and vaccination programs are highly effective. Rabies, however, remains a serious health threat. Dog owners need to take the vaccination recommendations seriously and discuss the matter with a trusted veterinarian to ensure the protection and safety of their families and their pets.

The transmission of the rabies virus occurs through a bite from an infected animal. Common carriers include skunks, raccoons, foxes, coyotes, and bats. The virus is shed in saliva, and when a rabid animal bites a dog, the virus spreads through the nervous system and moves to the brain in 2 to 6 weeks. After the virus reaches the brain, the dog may experience one or more of the following phases:

- Prodromal phase is characterized by apprehension, nervousness, anxiety, and antisocial behavior. Fever may be present. Dogs that are normally friendly may snap easily; aggressive dogs may become quiet and affectionate. It is common for the dog to lick the site of the bite. This stage lasts for 2-3 days and the dog may have fever spikes and erratic behavior.
- In the furious phase, the dog becomes restless and irritable and is hypersensitive to auditory and visual stimuli. The dog may become vicious, disoriented, and have seizures. Death can occur in the furious stage.
- The paralytic (also called "dumb") phase follows either of the first stages. During this phase, the dog may salivate, have trouble breathing, and the jaw may drop as the facial muscles become paralyzed.

Since rabies is highly preventable through vaccination, taking precautions such as proper vaccinations and preventing contact with wild animals are essential safeguards.

*The laws regarding rabies vaccination and biting animals are regional and variable. It is important to consult your veterinarian or local animal control department for up-to-date information.*

Any dog bitten or scratched by a pet suspected of having rabies, a wild carnivorous mammal, or a bat is considered exposed to rabies. Vaccinated dogs should be revaccinated immediately and need to be closely observed for 45 days. It is recommended that an exposed unvaccinated dog be euthanized immediately. If the owner is unwilling to have this done, the animal should be placed in strict isolation for 6 months.