

Rabies: Understanding This Still-Active Disease

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



All warm-blooded animals and humans can contract the rabies virus. Domestic cats that are allowed to roam outdoors are at higher risk of coming into contact with a rabid animal and contracting the virus. There is no treatment for rabies, and the instances of unvaccinated cats surviving the infection are extremely rare. While vaccination programs are highly effective, rabies remains a serious health threat. It is essential for cat owners to take vaccination recommendations seriously to ensure the protection and safety of their families and pets.

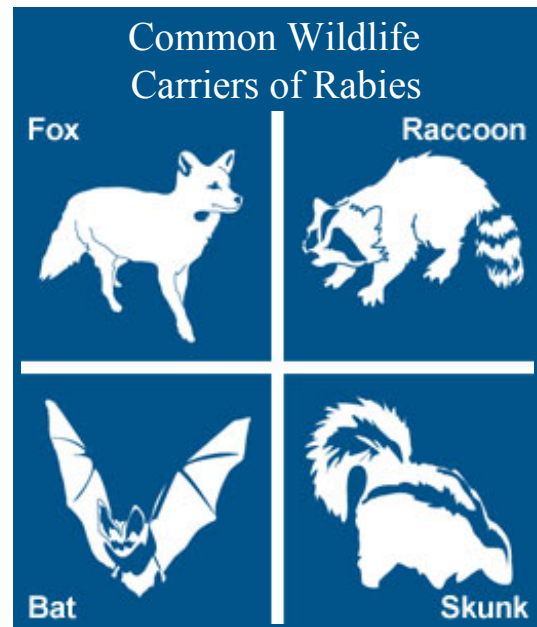
The transmission of the rabies virus occurs through a bite from an infected animal. Common carriers include skunks, raccoons, foxes, coyotes, and bats. The virus is shed in saliva, and when a rabid animal bites a cat, the virus spreads through the nervous system and moves to the brain in two to six weeks. After the virus reaches the brain, the disease progresses through three phases: prodromal, furious, and paralytic.

Any cat bitten or scratched by an animal in the wild is considered exposed to rabies. Vaccinated cats need to be closely observed for 45 days. The only reliable

means of determining if an animal (wild or domestic) is infected with rabies is to examine the animal's brain tissue, so an unvaccinated feline is placed in strict isolation for six months or euthanized.

Since rabies is highly preventable through vaccination, restricting your cat from wandering, preventing contact with wild animals, and proper vaccinations are essential safeguards.

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



THE PHASES OF RABIES

- 1. PRODROMAL PHASE**
is characterized by apprehension, nervousness, anxiety, and hiding. This stage lasts for 1 to 2 days and the cat can have fever spikes and erratic behavior. The cat is likely to lick the site of the bite.
 - 2. In the FURIOUS PHASE**
the cat becomes restless and irritable and is hypersensitive to auditory and visual stimuli. The cat may become vicious, disoriented, and have seizures. Death can occur in the furious stage.
 - 3. The PARALYTIC (ALSO CALLED "DUMB") PHASE**
follows either of the first stages. The cat may salivate, show labored breathing, and the jaw may drop as the facial muscles become paralyzed. This is followed by respiratory failure and death.
- 