



# Rabies and Wildlife

## *What You Need to Know*

### **What Is Rabies?**

Rabies is an infection caused by a virus. Once contracted, it affects the central nervous system of all mammals, including humans. If untreated, rabies is fatal. Always seek medical attention if you have been scratched or bitten by an animal.

### **How Is It Transmitted?**

The rabid virus is transmitted through saliva and brain/nervous system tissue only. It is not transmitted through blood, feces, urine, or fur. All mammals can carry rabies, however, raccoons, bats, coyotes, foxes, and skunks are the most common carriers in the United States. Rabies becomes noninfectious when it dries out and when it is exposed to sunlight. Different environmental conditions affect the rate at which the virus becomes inactive, but in general, if the material containing the virus is dry, the virus can be considered noninfectious.

### **What Are the Symptoms?**

Early symptoms are much like those associated with the common cold or flu. They include: fever, headache, and general weakness or discomfort. As the disease progresses more symptoms appear, including, but not limited to; insomnia, anxiety, confusion, slight or partial paralysis, excitation, hallucinations, agitation, foaming at the mouth, difficulty swallowing, and hydrophobia (fear of water). Once these symptoms occur, death follows within days.

## What Can You Do To Prevent Rabies?

- 1) Vaccinate your pet.
- 2) Maintain control of your pets to reduce their exposure to wildlife.
- 3) Spay or neuter to decrease the number of stray animals.
- 4) Report any stray or ill animals to animal control.

## What To Do In Case Of A Bite?:

- 1) Do not panic. The CDC defines a bite of this sort as a medical urgency, not a medical emergency.
- 2) Wash any wounds immediately with soap and water.
- 3) See your doctor for treatment, he or she will decide if you need to begin treatment for rabies.
- 4) Treatment consists of a regimen of one dose of immune globulin and four doses of rabies vaccine over a 14-day period. Rabies immune globulin and the first dose of rabies vaccine should be given by your health care provider as soon as possible after exposure.
- 5) Additional doses of rabies vaccine should be given on days 3, 7, and 14 after the first vaccination.

If you see an animal behaving suspiciously or you are bitten while at the park, immediately contact a park ranger or call Park Dispatch toll free at 1(866)677-6677.

Information courtesy of the CDC and the Virginia Department of Health. For more complete information, visit:

<http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/>  
<http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/>

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The visitor center is open daily from 9:00am to 5:00pm, except Christmas, New Year's, and Thanksgiving Days.

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