

Rabies

Protect Your Family from Rabies



- Do not feed, touch or adopt wild animals, stray dogs or cats.
- Be sure your dogs and cats are up-to-date on their rabies vaccinations. Indiana state law requires a current vaccination for all cats, dogs and ferrets beginning at three months of age.
- Vaccinated pets serve as a buffer between rabid wildlife and humans. Protecting your pet also reduces your risk of exposure to rabies. Pets too young to be vaccinated should be kept indoors.
- Keep family pets indoors at night. Don't leave them outside unattended or let them roam free.
- Don't attract wild animals to your home or yard. Keep your property free of stored bird seed and other foods which may attract wildlife and strays. Feed pets indoors. Tightly cap or put away garbage cans. Board up openings in your attic, basement, porch or garage. Cap your chimney with screens.
- Encourage children to tell an adult immediately, if they are bitten or scratched by any animal. Tell children not to touch any animal they do not know.
- Report all animal bites or contact with wild animals to the county health office. If a wild animal is on your property, let it wander away. Bring children and pets indoors and alert neighbors who are outside.
- Report any wild animal that appears sick to the Indiana Department of Natural Resources Division of Fish & Wildlife Health Program at on.IN.gov/sickwildlife.

Rabies Facts

- **What is rabies?**
Rabies is a deadly disease caused by a virus that attacks the nervous system. Rabies can infect humans, pets, livestock and wildlife. The rabies virus is present in saliva and in the nervous tissue of rabid animals.

- **How are people and animals exposed to rabies?**

Exposure to rabies is most likely the result of an animal bite. However, a scratch or other contact with a rabid animal that allows virus-infected saliva to make contact with a person's (or animal's) mucous membranes or bloodstream (including eyes, mouth lining, etc.) can lead to infection. The rabies virus is not transmitted via skunk spray.

- Rabies is not carried only by wild animals. Unvaccinated pets and livestock and apparently docile wildlife can carry and spread the disease to people and animals.

- **What should you do if think you have been exposed to rabies?**

Wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water and seek medical attention immediately. Contact your doctor and your county health authority immediately. Try to capture the animal without damaging its head or risking further exposure.

- If an apparently healthy domestic dog or cat bites a human, it must be captured, confined and observed daily for at least 10 days following the bite. If the animal remains healthy during this period, the animal did not transmit rabies at the time of the bite.
- If a rabies-suspect biting animal cannot be observed or tested, or it tests positive for the virus, treatment must begin immediately. Human treatment consists of a dose of rabies-immune globulin administered as soon as possible after exposure. The first of four doses of rabies vaccine is given at the same time, with the remaining injections administered one at a time on days 3, 7 and 14 following the initial injection.
- People in high-risk occupations, such as veterinarians, wildlife biologists, wildlife rehabilitators, animal control officers and taxidermists, should consider obtaining a rabies pre-exposure vaccination, which consists of three injections of rabies vaccine in the arm. Boosters are generally required every two years, if the risk of contact continues. A vaccinated person later exposed to rabies must receive booster injections immediately after exposure.
- **What animals can get rabies?**

Rabies is most often found among wild mammals such as raccoons, bats, skunks and foxes. Cats, dogs, horses and livestock can also get rabies, if not vaccinated for their protection. Deer and large rodents, such as woodchucks, have been found rabid in areas affected by rabies.
- Some animals almost never get rabies. These include rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks, rats, mice, guinea pigs, gerbils and hamsters. They can get rabies, but it almost never happens.

- Other animals, such as birds, chickens, snakes, fish, turtles, lizards and insects, never get rabies.
- In Indiana, bats are the most common species to test positive for rabies. In 2024, [skunk-variant rabies was detected](#) in southeastern Indiana for the first time in 20 years. Active surveillance techniques are being implemented to help state and local officials better understand the extend of the rabies circulation among skunks.

- **What are the signs of rabies in an animal?**

The average incubation period of the virus is 3 weeks to 8 weeks, although periods of up to 1 year have been reported. The first sign of rabies is usually a change in the animal's behavior. It may become unusually aggressive or unusually tame. The animal may lose fear of people and natural enemies. It may become excited, irritable and snap at anything in its path. Or, it may appear affectionate and friendly. Staggering, convulsions, spitting, choking, frothing at the mouth and paralysis are sometimes noted. Many animals have a marked change in voice. The animal usually dies within one week after showing signs of rabies.