



Rabies—a killer disease

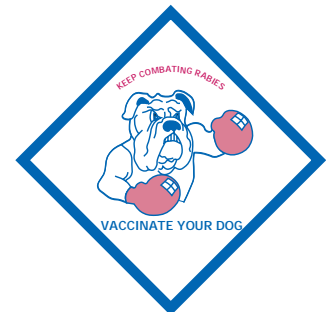
Rabies is a disease that affects all warm-blooded animals, as well as man

- In Africa wild animals like the yellow mongoose, the black-backed jackal and the bat-eared fox are known carriers of rabies. Dogs are the most common carriers and humans, other dogs and cattle are the most important victims.
- Rabies is transmitted in the saliva through the bite of an infected animal. The rabies virus moves to the brain of the victim after which symptoms appear. This may take from two to eight weeks and sometimes even longer.
- Once symptoms are seen, there is no cure—the person or animal bitten will die within three to nine days.

How will one know that an animal is rabid?

Rabies is readily recognised by some or all of the following symptoms:

- A sudden change of behaviour
- Staring at the sky
- Howling
- Salivation
- Deprived appetite
- Chewing stones
- Cowering
- Snapping
- Paralysis of the lower jaw and tongue.



A rabid **dog**, for example, will attack other dogs, animals, humans and other objects without warning.

Infected dogs lose territorial instincts and wander aimlessly, fighting and biting whatever crosses their path.

When a domesticated animal suddenly becomes wild and wanders around or a wild animal suddenly seems to become tame, one should suspect such an animal of being infected with rabies.

Eventually paralysis sets in before death. Inquisitive children and often livestock then approach the sick looking animal, only to be bitten viciously.

Cattle become aggressive, attack people, and chase dogs and strange objects like washing. Continuous wind sucking and bellowing are often seen while the cattle also salivate and strain.

Cattle often stand around water troughs but cannot drink or swallow. It looks as though a bone is stuck in the throat although there never is. This is a very dangerous situation, because normally a farmer will try to remove the obstruction. If he has an open wound on his arm he can easily be infected with the rabies virus through the saliva.

All these symptoms lead to hindquarter weakness, a swaying gait and eventually paralysis and death.

Rabid **cats** are very aggressive and will attack everything in their way.

Horses infected with rabies will chop, bite and show abnormal aggression followed by incoordination, weakness and death.

What can be done if animals appear sick and/or behave strangely?

- Report any abnormal or suspicious behaviour in animals to the veterinary or health authorities or to the Police.
- Do not feed, touch or pick up any stray, sick or injured animal or any animal behaving strangely.
- Report suspicious looking animals to the authorities so that they can be destroyed before doing even more damage.
- The authorities will remove the brain to confirm that the specific animal had rabies. This is the only way that rabies can be confirmed.
- Warn your friends of the imminent danger of rabies and try and restrain or control your pet.

What should be done if anyone gets bitten?

- If anybody is bitten by a suspected rabid animal, the wound should be washed as soon as possible under running water for three to five minutes. The wound should be disinfected and **medical attention sought without delay**.
- Any dog bite should be treated with suspicion. The doctor or medical official must be told about the suspect rabid animal and prompt anti-rabies vaccination should be emphasised.
- The dog involved should be traced and tested for rabies. If the dog tests positive for rabies or if the dog cannot be traced but the patient's description fits any of the rabies symptoms, the patient should have a series of anti-rabies injections.
- Delay in seeking help could lead to death as there is no cure once the symptoms set in.

What measures can be taken to protect your family and your pets from rabies?

- Rabies can be prevented by having all your dogs and cats from three months of age vaccinated against rabies. Young dogs should be vaccinated twice in the first year and thereafter annually.
- The vaccine is completely harmless and very effective. It has no effect on a dog's ability to hunt. It does not cause abortions or infertility. The injection does not hurt the dog or cat in any way and is given free of charge.
- Look out for posters advertising rabies clinics in your area and take your animals for an injection.
- If rabies breaks out in your area, have your dogs and cats revaccinated.

If all dogs and cats are vaccinated the disease will disappear.

Rabies is a killer disease for which there is no treatment or cure once symptoms appear. It is a very painful death for the victims.

All of us must keep fighting rabies. We must protect ourselves, our families and friends.

The only way we can do that is to have our dogs and cats regularly vaccinated against rabies.

Contact your local state veterinarian for further information

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