

What is Rabies?

Rabies is a deadly disease caused by a virus. Rabies is almost always fatal, but prompt vaccination after an exposure may prevent the disease from progressing.

How is Rabies Spread?

Rabies is spread from infected animals to people by **saliva**. This could happen after an animal bite or scratch or by a contaminated animal's saliva coming into contact with the moist tissues in a person's mouth, nose or eyes or also a cut or open wound.

How Can I tell if an Animal Has Rabies?

Animals with rabies often act strangely. Dogs and cats, for instance, may become mean and bite or scratch for no reason. Some may become depressed and retreat to isolated places. While these behaviours may be present in a rabid animal, the reality is that it cannot be determined if an animal has rabies just by looking at it.

Can Rabies be treated?

Yes. If you are bitten or scratched by an animal with rabies, you will get a series of rabies shots of post-exposure immunization. This treatment is proven to be effective and safe.

What should I do if I am bitten or scratched?

1. Wash the area thoroughly with soap and water.
2. Call your family doctor or seek immediate medical attention.
3. Report the bite or scratch to the Middlesex-London Health Unit. Your doctor or the hospital emergency department can also do this.

What can I do to prevent Rabies?

- ✓ Immunize your pets against rabies – it's the law!
- ✓ Prevent pets running free in neighbourhoods and keep them in at night.
- ✓ Don't feed or touch any wild, stray or unknown animals.
- ✓ Report all animal bites or scratches to the Health Unit.
- ✓ If your pet has been bitten by an animal that you think may be rabid, put gloves on before touching your pet.
- ✓ Bat-proof your home and cottage (**note: a rabid bat can infect you or your unvaccinated pet with rabies**).
- ✓ People who work with animals (such as veterinarians, animal care workers, and trappers) should protect themselves through pre-exposure immunization.

Ontario Law Requires That All Dogs And Cats Must Be Immunized Against Rabies!

- The Rabies Immunization Regulation is in effect to protect everyone in the area served by the Middlesex-London Health Unit.
- The Regulation means all dogs and cats three months of age and older **must** be immunized.
- A veterinarian may exempt aged or infirm pets from vaccination, providing the animal is confined or restrained to avoid potential exposure to rabies.
- Failure to provide proof of current immunization for your pet may result in a fine.

It's important that we all do our part. By vaccinating our dogs and cats we protect our families, our friends and ourselves.

What Is Health Unit's Role?

The Middlesex-London Health Unit:

- Investigates incidents of human exposure from potentially rabid animals, either domestic or wild.
- Ensures animals that bite or scratch are kept confined and isolated for the required ten-day period.
- Visually inspects confined animals prior to their release from isolation.
- Provides consultation and provides vaccines to physicians where post-exposure rabies treatment is required.
- Follows up to ensure that pets involved in biting incidents have current rabies immunization.

For more information about Rabies contact:

Middlesex-London Health Unit,
Environmental Health:
519-663-5317 ext. 2300
or visit the Health Unit's website at:
www.healthunit.com/rabies.

Resources

Ontario. Ministry of the Attorney General. (1990). *Health Protection and Promotion Act, R.R.O. 1990, Regulation 567 Rabies Immunization*. Retrieved from <http://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/900567>

Ontario. Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. (2014, May). *Rabies questions and answers*. Retrieved from <http://www.ontario.ca/document/rabies-questions-and-answers>

Public Health Agency of Canada. (2015, May 19). *Canadian immunization guide: Part 4: Active vaccines. Rabies vaccines*. Retrieved from <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/ciq-gci/p04-rabi-rage-eng.php>

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