

IS RABIES STILL AROUND IN 2005?

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The CDC reports more than \$300 million is spent annually to detect, prevent & control rabies. Approximately 40,000 persons are treated annually for rabies. More than 90% of cases requiring treatment are due to contact with wild animals, particularly bats. Only 1 or 2 human deaths occur annually, with human deaths occurring due to non-treatment. Mention rabies & many people think of dogs, but Indiana pets are rarely found to be rabid. Indiana animals considered to be at highest risk of transmitting rabies are bats, skunks, foxes, raccoon's & coyotes. Other Indiana animals that have tested positive for rabies since 1962 are cows, goats, ground hogs, horses, opossums, pigs & sheep. The last time an Indiana dog was found to be rabid was 1989 & the last time an Indiana cat was found to be rabid was 1984. Since any mammal has the risk of having rabies rats, mice, rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks, etc. could theoretically transmit rabies, but bites from these animals are not presently considered a risk in Indiana. The most recently reported carrier of rabies in Indiana was a bat, with 445 bats testing positive since 1962 & 2004 being the last year a positive test was noted from a bat.

What symptoms does a rabid animal show?

The first sign is a change in behavior. A calm animal may become aggressive & attack other animals, or even inanimate objects, although the animal doesn't always become aggressive. An active animal may seem depressed, uncoordinated, weak & has a dull, vacant expression. Weakness eventually leads to paralysis & death. The animal may drool & foam, due to a decreased ability to swallow. Death from rabies is always due to respiratory paralysis. Rabid wild animals may lose their fear of humans & nocturnal animals may be seen during daylight hours. A rabid bat may be active by day, found in a location where bats are not usually present, such as your home, & unable to fly.

What symptoms appear in a human with rabies?

Rabies in humans is similar to rabies in another animal. The first sign is usually a feeling of apprehension and itching or tingling at the site of the bite. Other signs are headaches, weakness, paralysis & death. Because swallowing is often impossible humans often show extreme agitation and panic when offered water. Once symptoms appear, rabies is not curable. Only a few people have survived rabies & almost all suffered permanent neurological damage. Rabies is preventable after the bite, but not after symptoms develop.

How can I prevent being bitten by a rabid animal?

- 1. Don't attempt to pet animals you do not know**
- 2. Don't approach animals that are sleeping, injured, eating or caring for young**
- 3. Avoid contact with wild animals; enjoy them from a distance**
- 4. Exclude wildlife access to your home, garage, etc.**
- 5. Don't leave pet food out where it will attract wildlife**
- 6. Keep garbage containers closed & secure**

What should I do if I am bit or scratched, or if saliva from a potentially rabid animal gets

into my eyes, nose, mouth, or a wound?

1. Keep in mind that people cannot get rabies from feces, blood or urine, or from touching an animals fur

2. Wash the area thoroughly

3. Go to your health care professional or emergency room immediately if the bite or scratch

is severe or bleeding, in any case notify your health care professional that you have been bitten, scratched or have come in contact with animal saliva

4. There are situations in which you should seek medical advice, even in the absence of an obvious bite wound. For example, if you awaken and find a bat in your room, see a bat in the room of an unattended child, or see a bat near a mentally impaired or intoxicated person.

5. Make sure you are up to date on your tetanus vaccination

6. Follow any treatment regiment prescribed by your health care professional

7. If possible, without causing further injury, try to identify or capture the biting animal

8. Notify your county health department or animal control agency. The biting animal may need to be observed or tested to make sure that you were not exposed to rabies. If the animal is a dog, cat or ferret, it can be observed for 10 days after the bite. If it is not ill after that time, you were not exposed to rabies. Alternatively, dogs, cats or ferrets can be

ethanized & tested immediately. High-risk wild animals should be killed & tested immediately. For other exposures, consult your local health department. Testing for rabies in Indiana is only done the ISDH Disease Control Lab.

What should I do if my pet is exposed to a potentially rabid animal?

1. Contact a veterinarian or your local health department immediately if your pet is bitten or scratched by a potentially rabid animal

2. Remember to keep vaccinations up to date on your cats, dogs and other animals

The CDC (Centers for Disease Control) and ISDH (Indiana State Department of Health) web sites (www.cdc.gov and www.in.gov/isdh) were used as a resource, for the writing of this article.