

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Division of Epidemiology, Disease Surveillance and Investigation
899 N. Capitol Street, NE, Suite 580
Washington, D.C. 20002
(202) 442-9371 • Fax (202) 442-8060 • www.doh.dc.gov

RABIES

HYDROPHOBIA

What is rabies?

Rabies is a viral disease affecting the central nervous system. It is transmitted from an infected animal to man and is invariably fatal once symptoms appear.

Who gets rabies?

All warm-blooded animals are susceptible to rabies. Humans contract rabies from a bite or scratch of an infected animal.

How is rabies spread?

Rabies is almost always contracted by exposure to a rabid animal. The exposure is usually through a bite, but scratches and saliva contact with broken skin are also possible routes.

What are symptoms of rabies?

Early symptoms include irritability, headache, fever and sometimes itching or pain at the site of the exposure. The disease eventually progresses to paralysis, spasms of the throat muscles, convulsions, delirium and death.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

The time period varies but is normally two to eight weeks. Periods of over one year have been reported.

When and for how long is a person able to spread rabies?

Person to person spread is extremely rare; however, precautions should be taken to prevent exposure to the saliva of the diseased person.

What is the treatment for rabies?

Treatment requires prompt scrubbing of the bite site, followed by the administration of rabies

immune globulin (dosage dependent on weight) and five doses of human diploid cell rabies vaccine administered on days 0, 3, 7 and 14 after exposure.

What happens if rabies exposure goes untreated?

Exposure of man to a rabid animal does not always result in rabies. If preventive treatment is obtained promptly following a rabies exposure, most cases of rabies will be prevented. Untreated cases will invariably result in death. That is why it is important for you to see a physician immediately if you are bitten by an animal especially a wild animal.

What can be done to prevent the spread of rabies?

Exposure to rabies may be reduced by avoiding contact with all stray dogs and cats, having pets vaccinated, staying away from wild animals, and avoiding contact with any animal acting abnormal. Do not handle, feed or unintentionally attract wild animals by leaving trashcans uncovered. Never "adopt" a sick or wild animal. A veterinarian should examine your pet if it is bitten by a wild animal.

For more Information on this topic:

Information about rabies and other related health topics can be found at: <http://www.dchealth.dc.gov/> or <http://www.cdc.gov/>.

The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. To report animal bites or bats in a house, please call Animal Control 24 hours a day at 202-576-6664.

For additional information, please call 202-442-9371.

