



Dutchess County Department of  
Behavioral & Community Health  
presents

# Preventing Rabies

Spring 2023



**What is Rabies?** Rabies is a viral infection that affects the nervous system of mammals. The virus is spread through the saliva and nervous tissue of rabid animals. People and animals are usually exposed to rabies through a bite from an infected animal. Exposure can occur if the saliva or nervous tissue of a rabid animal enters an open wound or mucous membrane (such as the eyes, nose, or mouth). Since the small teeth of a bat can make a bat bite difficult to detect, the presence of a bat in a room with a sleeping person, unattended child, or an intoxicated or mentally compromised person is also considered an exposure.

**Can you avoid exposure and prevent rabies?**

Yes, there are several ways that you can reduce your risk of exposure to the rabies virus. These include: **1)** avoiding contact with wild animals such as raccoons, foxes, skunks, woodchucks, and bats; **2)** not approaching or handling domestic animals that you do not know including stray dogs and cats; **3)** not attempting to handle or capture sick or "orphaned" wildlife; **4)** keeping your home and yard free of food and other debris that may attract wild animals; this can be done by storing all garbage in animal-resistant containers and feeding pets indoors; **5)** keeping doors and windows to homes or garages closed or screened; **6)** making sure your dogs, cats, domestic ferrets, horses and other livestock (cattle, sheep, and goats) are up-to-date on their rabies vaccinations.

**Why does my pet need to be confined and observed if it bites someone?**

If a dog or cat bites a person, the animal must be observed for 10 days to see if symptoms of rabies develop. This is necessary even if the animal has been vaccinated. Signs of rabies include changes in the animal's behavior, unusual aggression, a loss of fear of people and natural enemies, trouble walking, difficulty swallowing, excessive salivation, and paralysis. If a dog or cat remains healthy for at least 10 days after it bites someone, it could not have had the rabies virus in its saliva at the time of the bite.

**What should you do if you are bitten by an animal?** **1)** If you are bitten by someone's pet and the animal is with its owner, get the owner's name and address. If the bite is from a wild or stray animal, look to see if there are any features that will allow you to identify it later on; then call your local animal control officer or nuisance wildlife officer to try to capture the animal for rabies testing or observation. If you are in contact with a bat and it is possible to do so without endangering yourself, capture the bat in a container and call the Department of Behavioral & Community Health to arrange for rabies testing; **2)** wash the wound carefully with plenty of soap and water and seek medical attention immediately; **3)** report the bite to the Department of Behavior & Community Health; Department personnel will determine whether rabies post-exposure treatment is necessary.

**Is there a treatment for rabies?** There is no known treatment or cure for rabies once symptoms develop, but rabies can be prevented if rabies immunoglobulin and vaccine are given after exposure to the virus.

**When should I report a rabies incident to the Dutchess County Department of Behavioral & Community Health?**

You should Immediately report: **1)** any bite or contact with a wild animal or a stray dog/cat; **2)** any bite to a human by a domestic pet; **3)** any human contact with a domestic pet which has been in direct conflict with a wild animal; **4)** any direct contact between a domestic pet or livestock and a potentially rabid animal; **5)** a bat observed in a room with a sleeping person, unattended child or intoxicated or mentally compromised person.

**To report an incident, call:**

**(845) 486-3404 [Monday-Friday, 9am - 5pm]**  
**(845) 431-6465 [Nights/Weekends/Holidays]**

**For more info, visit [DutchessNY.gov/Rabies](https://www.dutchessny.gov/Rabies)**

William F.X. O'Neil  
County Executive



Livia Santiago-Rosado, MD, FACEP  
Commissioner