



## **RABIES**

### **WHAT IS RABIES?**

Rabies is a viral disease that affects the nervous system of mammals (warm-blooded animals that have hair or fur and produce milk to feed their young). Rabies is found worldwide, and there are many strains of the virus. Certain wildlife species can carry specific strains (raccoons, skunks, foxes, and bats). Rabies is fatal once symptoms appear. Rabies in persons is very rare in Canada.

### **WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF RABIES?**

The incubation period is typically one to three months. The early symptoms of rabies include headache, fever, lethargy, and sometimes discomfort at the site of exposure. Within days the disease progresses to paralysis, spasms of the throat muscles, convulsions, delirium, and death.

### **HOW IS RABIES SPREAD?**

Rabies is almost always spread by the bite of an infected animal. The saliva of an infected animal will contain virus during the period of symptomatic illness. Occasionally, non-bite transmission of rabies can occur if saliva on nerve tissue (brain and spinal cord) from an infected animal contacts broken skin (open wounds) or mucous membranes (skin found in the eyes, nose and mouth). Bats are the most common source of infection for persons. Persons who touch bats are at greater risk of contacting rabies.

### **WHO CAN GET RABIES?**

Everyone is susceptible to rabies and may get the disease if exposed.

### **CAN RABIES BE TREATED?**

Once clinical signs of rabies appear, the disease is fatal. If you believe you have been exposed to the rabies virus (e.g., bite or scratch from an animal that might have rabies), prompt rabies treatment is extremely effective in preventing the disease. Rabies treatment may include wound care, administration of rabies immune globulin, and a series of rabies vaccines.

### **HOW CAN RABIES BE PREVENTED?**

Be a responsible pet owner. Enjoy wildlife from a distance, including bats that are unable to fly. Prevent dog and cat bites. Report suspecting animals to the Rabies Information Line at 1-877-372-2437. Go to the hospital if you are bitten.

For additional information, contact your regional Public Health office or your family doctor.

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