

IF THE BITING ANIMAL IS WILD, STRAY, OR UNKNOWN

If the animal cannot be identified, located, and assessed (such as a stray or wild animal), the victim will be referred to receive rabies post-exposure prophylaxis to prevent rabies since the rabies status of the animal cannot be determined. You cannot tell if an animal has rabies just by observing the way it looks and behaves.

There is a period of time when an animal can have the rabies virus in its saliva but still look healthy. If it is a wild animal that has been captured, it may be euthanized and tested for rabies. This is for the protection of the human.

If a bat was discovered in your home and there is a possibility that someone was bitten without knowing it, contact DPH at 1-888-295-5156 to discuss next steps. If the bat is available, it can be tested for rabies. If the bat is unavailable, contact DPH at the above number to discuss what you should do next.

QUESTIONS about rabies quarantines, animal control or animal welfare? Call the DPH Office of Animal Welfare at 302-255-4646.

QUESTIONS about rabies virus, postexposure prophylaxis or other general inquiries? Call Delaware DPH, Office of Infectious Disease Epidemiology at 302-744-4995.



FIND DOG BITE PREVENTION TIPS:
**American Society for the Prevention
of Cruelty to Animals**

www.asPCA.org/pet-care/dog-care/dog-bite-prevention

American Veterinary Medicine Association
www.avma.org/public/Pages/Dog-Bite-Prevention.aspx

RABIES EXPOSURE



YOU'VE BEEN BITTEN BY AN ANIMAL. WHAT NOW?



DELAWARE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES
Division of Public Health
Office of Infectious Disease Epidemiology

ABOUT RABIES

Rabies is a deadly, but preventable disease that is spread primarily through the bite of an infected mammal. In the United States, the rabies virus is mainly found in wild animals such as bats, raccoons, foxes, and skunks but has also been found in domestic animals or pets such as dogs, cats and ferrets. The first symptoms of rabies infection in humans are general and tend to increase in severity as the infection spreads to the brain. Early symptoms can include irritability, headache, fever, and sometimes itching or tingling pain at the site of exposure. Only a few human cases are reported in the United States each year. The last diagnosed case of human rabies in Delaware was in 2018.



Rabies virus is found in infected mammals' saliva. When an infected animal bites another animal or human, the virus can be passed through broken skin. It is possible, but rare, for people to get rabies if an infected animal's saliva gets directly into their eyes, nose, mouth, or an open wound.

The incubation period (time between exposure and development of symptoms) for rabies varies but is usually three to eight weeks. Cases have also been confirmed with shorter and much longer (months to years) incubation periods.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF AN ANIMAL BITES YOU?

1. **Identify the animal.** Most animals that have bitten a person must either be quarantined and observed for signs of rabies or be tested for rabies.
2. **Immediately wash the wound.** Wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water.
3. **See a health care provider.** Bite wounds can become infected and you may need an antibiotic. You may also need a tetanus shot. The provider will determine whether rabies post-exposure treatment is necessary. They may consult the Delaware Division of Public Health (DPH) to help make this determination.



SHOULD I GET RABIES POSTEXPOSURE TREATMENT RIGHT AWAY?

If the biting animal is a dog, cat, or ferret, and is available for observation, rabies treatment can be delayed while the animal is quarantined (observed) in either the home (for vaccinated pets) or a secure facility (such as a veterinary clinic, for unvaccinated pets) for 10 days.

WHY A 10-DAY QUARANTINE?

In Delaware, a dog, cat, or ferret that has bitten a human must undergo a mandatory 10-day quarantine period. The quarantine is set at 10 days because the rabies-infected animal can only transmit the disease after clinical signs have developed. Once these signs have developed, the animal will die within 10 days. If the animal lives beyond the tenth day, it was not shedding the rabies virus at the time the bite occurred.

If the animal develops symptoms or dies before the tenth day, it can be tested for rabies. If the test is positive, a human bite victim will still have enough time to receive post-exposure vaccinations and prevent the disease. There is no test that can be done on live animals to see if they have rabies. Only brain tissue can be tested, which can only come from a dead animal. This is why the biting animal is observed instead.

Rabies testing in Delaware is conducted by the DPH Laboratory in Smyrna. While a priority, the steps involved in preparing and transporting the specimen to the lab, involve multiple agencies. Results can sometimes take up to three business days. Every effort is made to obtain results for the human victim as quickly as possible.

HOW TO PREVENT RABIES

1. Don't feed stray animals.
2. Don't pet wild or stray animals.
3. Don't keep wild animals as pets.
4. Keep your pet vaccinations up-to-date.
5. Report stray animals to local authorities.
6. Keep your pets under control. Loose animals are more likely to be exposed to rabies.
7. Keep your trash cans tightly closed.