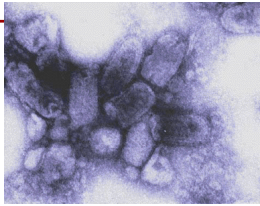

Should I Panic?



Often, people panic about rabies as a result of misleading media articles and folklore. It is vital to understand the facts about rabies, correct exaggerated fears, and know what sensible precautions you can take to prevent rabies exposure—such as vaccinating your companion animals and getting prompt post-exposure shots if you are bitten by a possibly rabid animal.

Given all the media attention, people are surprised to learn that very few people die from rabies nationwide each year. Human fatalities due to lightning strikes and bad hamburgers far exceed the number of human deaths due to rabies. This doesn't mean we shouldn't be concerned about rabies—it means that we should take sensible precautions, use common sense, and calm down!

Some Definitions

Bite Exposure - Any penetration of the skin by the teeth of a rabid animal.

Nonbite Exposure - Scratches, abrasions, open wounds, or mucous membranes contaminated with saliva or brain tissue from a rabid animal.

Not sure if you have broken skin on your hands?
Apply rubbing alcohol to see if and where it stings.

Our Mission

The goal of the Mercer County Wildlife Center is to protect the future of native wildlife species through education, rehabilitation, and release.

How Many Humans Have Died of Raccoon Rabies?

The answer, to everyone's surprise, is "NONE." The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has compiled statistics on the number and type of human rabies cases in the U.S. since 1980. Interestingly, most of the human rabies cases (2-3 annually) have resulted from a canine strain contracted overseas, or the bat strain. Most of the bat cases have been of the silver-haired bat strain, which is surprising because this species is rarely found in or around human houses.



Want to Learn More?

A big "thank you" to The Fund for Animals for providing the information in this pamphlet. For more details about rabies, visit The Fund for Animals web site at www.fund.org and link to their Coexisting with Wildlife Fact Sheet #5, Common Misconceptions about Rabies.

Mercer County Wildlife Center



Common Misconceptions about Rabies



P.O. Box 161
Titusville, NJ 08560
(609) 883-6606

www.mercercounty.org/mcwc/mcwc.htm



Some Commonly Asked Questions

Can I get rabies by sitting on the grass a rabid animal drooled on?

The virus cannot penetrate intact skin. *People can only get rabies via a bite from a rabid animal or through scratches, abrasions, open wounds or mucous membranes contaminated with saliva or brain tissue from a rabid animal.* In addition, the virus is short-lived when exposed to the open air and is no longer viable after saliva dries up. If you are handling a companion animal who has been in a fight with a potentially rabid animal, wear gloves to prevent contact with any still-fresh saliva.

Can rabies be spread through feces or blood?

Rabies is NOT transmitted through the blood, urine, or feces of an infected animal nor is it spread airborne through the open environment. Saliva is the primary way for an animal who is in the clinical stages of rabies to transmit the virus. For the rabies virus to get to the salivary glands, it has to travel first from the site of entry (usually a bite wound) through the animal's nervous system, then to the brain. This is what causes most rabid animals to exhibit



abnormal behaviors, depending on what part of the brain is affected. Finally, the virus travels to the salivary glands during the terminal stage of rabies, about 4 to 10 days before death. An animal is most infectious in this latter stage of rabies because the virus is in the saliva.

Don't a lot of bats carry rabies?

Actually, a very small percentage of bats carry rabies—much less than one percent of the population. However, if you suspect that a bat has bitten you, or if a bat is found in the room where a person is sleeping, contact your local health department for instructions.

If a fox is running around during the day, is it rabid?

It is quite common to see foxes hunting by day. It is also normal for the kits to be seen playing by themselves, seeming to have no parents around and perhaps showing little fear of people. There's usually no need for intervention—soon the parents will appear and eventually the kits will learn to be wary of humans. You can bang pot tops together to help teach the kits to be fearful of people.

What about young raccoons that are out during the day?

When young raccoons are orphaned, they don't know night from day—they only know that



they are extremely hungry. This is when they tend to plunge out of trees. If the mother raccoon doesn't retrieve the young raccoon after several hours, call us. Do not touch the raccoon.

OK, how about young skunks?

Skunks are very nearsighted, so a young skunk running around during the day has likely lost sight of its mother. An orphaned skunk will appear frantic. If the mother does not come within a couple of hours to retrieve it, call us.

Is an opossum that is hissing and drooling rabid?

Opossums are amazingly resistant to rabies. Hissing, drooling, and swaying are part of the opossum's bluff routine to scare YOU off. Leave it alone and it will eventually wander off.

I have seen woodchucks and squirrels circle and fall over—is it rabies?

Squirrels rarely get rabies; rabies in woodchucks is less rare. However, it is likely that what you have seen is the effect of the roundworm brain parasite, which causes signs that look exactly like rabies. This behavior could also be a result of head trauma. Call us for advice.