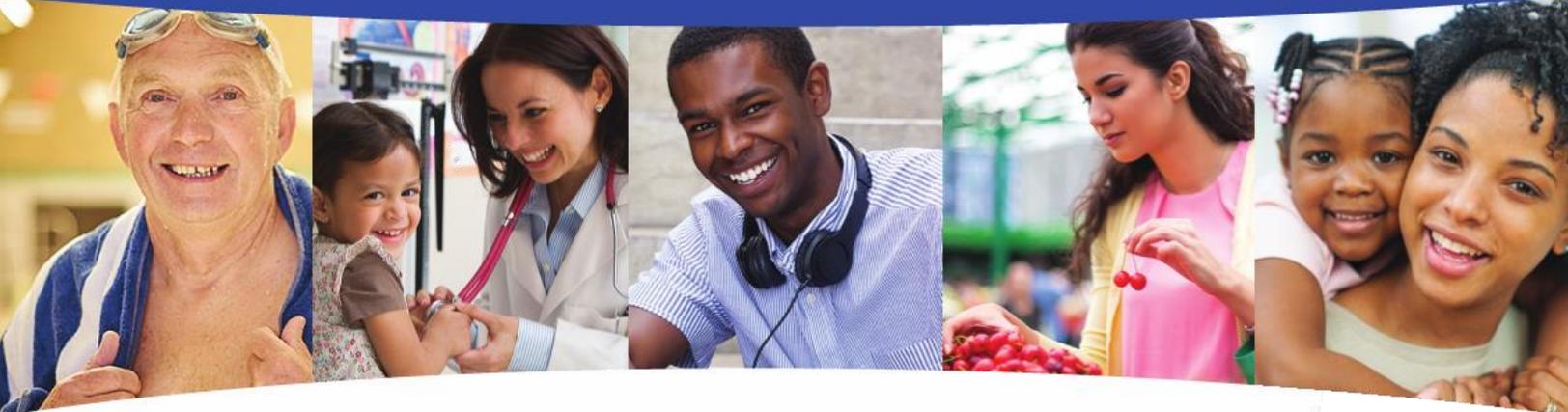


# Rabies Fact Sheet

Toledo-Lucas County Health Department | Emergency Preparedness



## What is rabies?

Rabies is a preventable viral disease of mammals most often transmitted through the bite of a rabid animal. The vast majority of rabies cases reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) each year occur in wild animals like raccoons, skunks, bats, and foxes. The rabies virus infects the central nervous system, ultimately causing disease in the brain and death.

## What are the signs and symptoms of rabies?

The first symptoms of rabies may be very similar to those of the flu including general weakness or discomfort, fever, or headache. These symptoms may last for days.

There may also be discomfort or a prickling or itching sensation at the site of the bite, progressing within day to symptoms of cerebral dysfunction, anxiety, confusion, and agitation. As the disease progresses, the person may experience delirium, abnormal behavior, hallucinations, and insomnia.

The acute period of disease typically ends after 2 to 10 days. Once clinical signs of rabies appear, the disease is always near fatal, and treatment is typically supportive. Disease prevention includes administration of both passive antibody, through an injection of human immune globulin and a round of injections with rabies vaccine.

## How is rabies transmitted?

All species of mammals are susceptible to rabies virus infection, but only a few species are reservoirs for the disease. In the United States, distinct strains of rabies virus have been identified in raccoons, skunks, foxes, and coyotes. Several species of bats are also reservoirs for strains of the rabies virus.

Transmission of rabies virus usually begins when infected saliva of a host is passed to an uninfected animal or human. The most common mode of rabies virus transmission is



through the bite and virus-containing saliva of an infected host. Though transmission has been rarely documented via other routes such as contamination of mucous membranes (i.e., eyes, nose, mouth), aerosol transmission, and corneal and organ transplantations.



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## How is rabies diagnosed?

In humans, several tests are required to diagnose rabies. Rapid and accurate laboratory diagnosis of rabies in humans and other animals is essential for timely administration of post exposure prophylaxis. Within a few hours, a diagnostic laboratory can determine whether or not an animal is rabid and inform medical personnel. The laboratory results may save the patient from unnecessary physical and psychological trauma, and financial burdens, if the animal is not rabid.

## What is the treatment for rabies?

**Wound care.** Regardless of the risk of rabies, bite wounds can cause serious injury such as nerve or tendon laceration and infections. Wound cleansing is especially important in rabies prevention since, in animal studies, thorough wound cleansing alone without other post-exposure prophylaxis has been shown to reduce the likelihood of rabies. You should also receive a tetanus shot if you have not been immunized in ten years.

**Rabies Post-exposure Vaccinations.** For people who have never been vaccinated against rabies, post-exposure anti-rabies vaccination should always include administration of both passive antibody and vaccine. Rabies post-exposure prophylaxis consists of a dose of human rabies immune globulin and rabies vaccine given on the day of the exposure, and then a dose of vaccine given again on days 3, 7, and 14.

If a person has previously received post exposure vaccinations or received pre-exposure vaccinations, only two doses of vaccine (on the day of exposure and then 3 days later) are needed. Human rabies immune globulin is not required.

## For more information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):  
<https://www.cdc.gov/rabies/index.html>

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