

Rabies Information **for Victims & Pet Owners**



Thunder Bay District
Health Unit
www.tbdhu.com

Rabies Information

for Victims & Pet Owners



Every year, the Thunder Bay District Health Unit investigates over 400 animal bites. Bites, scratches or other contact with animals can lead to rabies, a dangerous disease that can be fatal. Any warm blooded animal can carry the rabies virus. In the District of Thunder Bay, a fox, bat, horse and skunk have tested positive for rabies.

THE LAW:

Any animal contact that may result in rabies must be reported to the Thunder Bay District Health Unit.

WHAT TO DO IF BITTEN OR SCRATCHED

- 1** If you or someone you know is bitten or scratched by a wild animal or pet, or may have come in contact with a bat, **contact your doctor** immediately, even if it has been months since your exposure.
- 2** Then, call the Health Unit at 625-8318 or toll-free 1-888-294-6630, ext. 8318.

If treated in time, rabies in humans can be prevented but it is critical to begin treatment for rabies exposure immediately. The disease is fatal in humans if symptoms appear.

FIRST AID IF BITTEN BY AN ANIMAL

- 1** If you are bitten or scratched by an animal that you think may have rabies, you should: Wash the wound well with soap and warm water for at least 5 minutes. This lessens the chance of any infection.
- 2** If available, apply either 70% ethanol or iodine solution to the wound.
- 3** Seek medical attention right away.

WHAT IS RABIES?

Rabies is a serious disease that is caused by a virus. The disease is contagious and affects the central nervous system (brain and spinal cord). Warm blooded animals can get the disease and pass it on to others.

HOW DO ANIMALS GET RABIES?

An animal usually gets rabies from the saliva (bite) or scratch of another animal that has the disease. Rabies is most often seen in wild animals such as raccoons, skunks, foxes and bats. It may also be seen in livestock and pets, such as dogs and cats.

HOW DO PEOPLE GET RABIES?

The rabies virus may be spread to a human through a bite or scratch from an infected animal. It can also enter the human body through a break in the skin. In rare cases, exposure can also occur if infected saliva or nervous tissue gets into a fresh wound or mucous membranes, such as the eyes, nose and mouth. The most common period of time between exposure to the virus and the development of symptoms is 3–8 weeks. Sometimes, it may be as short as 9 days or as long as 7 years depending on the location of the bite.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS THAT AN ANIMAL HAS RABIES?

Animals with rabies will act differently from healthy animals. They may change their normal behaviour by:

- becoming more aggressive, timid or shy,
- drooling more than usual,
- having problems eating or drinking,
- moving slowly (wild animals), or
- being afraid of water (hydrophobia).

Squirrels, hamsters, guinea pigs, gerbils, chipmunks, rats, mice, rabbits, and hares are unlikely to be infected with rabies. Their bites rarely call for treatment against rabies; however, they do require medical treatment.

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR POSSIBLE EXPOSURE TO RABIES?

Your doctor may give you a vaccine to prevent the disease. The vaccine will be given based on the guidelines your doctor has received from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

Also, a Public Health Inspector will investigate the incident and collect information from both you and the animal owner (if applicable). The information collected may include the type of animal, the circumstances surrounding your exposure, and other information as required. A complete risk assessment will be conducted for each incident.

If you are a candidate for the vaccine, you will be given five doses of the vaccine in the upper arm (or thigh in a small child) over a scheduled period of one month. An additional dose will be given at the site of the bite and/or the buttock. Talk to your doctor about any possible allergies, side effects and health concerns.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF MY PET (dog, cat, or ferret) BITES OR SCRATCHES SOMEONE?

If an animal in your care has bitten or scratched a person, **the Health Unit must be advised immediately.**

Once reported, a Public Health Inspector will contact you (the caretaker or owner of the animal). To find out if the animal had the rabies virus in its saliva at the time of the incident, an isolation period of at least 10 days is needed. It should take 10 days or less for the virus to make an animal ill after it has reached the animal's saliva.

During this time:

- The animal must be isolated and confined.
- Only the person caring for the animal should be near the animal.
- Keep all other animals and people away.
- Do not allow the animal to run at large.
- Chain and/or fence in the animal when it's outside.
- The animal must not be destroyed, sold, or given away.

- It must be kept alive until it is released by a Public Health Inspector. **If you are not able to confine or isolate the animal at home, contact your veterinarian or local Animal Services for other options.**

Should the animal become sick or die, the Health Unit **MUST** be notified immediately at 807-625-8318 or toll free at 1-888-294-6630, extension 8318. On weekends and after hours call Nurse's Registry at 807-623-7451 to reach an On-call Public Health Inspector.

If you have any questions about the care of your pet during the confinement period, talk to your Public Health Inspector.

A Public Health Inspector will contact you towards the end of the 10-day period and arrange to observe and release the animal. The Inspector must see the animal to verify it is healthy and alive. These releases are done during the regular business week.

WILL YOU TAKE MY PET AWAY?

No, if you confine and isolate your pet properly, we will not take it away.

DOES IT HAVE TO BE A 10-DAY PERIOD?

Yes. This is the law. The time can be longer but never shorter.



PROTECTING YOURSELF & FAMILY AGAINST RABIES

Do's and Don'ts...

- Ensure all pets and farm animals are regularly vaccinated against rabies.
- If your pet is bitten by another animal or in a fight with an animal, contact a veterinarian.
- Ensure your pets are on a leash at all times. Prevent them from running free in the neighborhood or in the woods.
- Avoid any animal that is dead or that you suspect has rabies.
- If you wake up and there is a bat in your home, call your doctor and the Health Unit, immediately.
- Avoid wild animals. Never adopt wild animals or bring them into your home.
- Do not touch stray animals even if they appear to be friendly.
- Do not disturb a dog that is sleeping, eating or has puppies.
- If a dog approaches you, stay still. If threatened by a dog, stay calm. If you are knocked to the ground by an animal, lie flat facing the ground with your hands covering your neck.
- Dogs may bite when they feel threatened, scared, excited or even startled. Dogs naturally protect their property, whether it is a car, their house or even their young.
- It is important to remember to slowly walk backwards away from a dog when it becomes aggressive. Do not stare directly at the dog.

CAN I GET THE RABIES VACCINATION BEFORE I GET EXPOSED?

There are only two reasons why you should be vaccinated against rabies before exposure:

1. If your occupation puts you at high risk of contact with potentially rabid animals or the rabies virus, you may be eligible for the vaccine. These occupations include certain laboratory workers, veterinarians, animal control officers, wildlife workers, cave explorers (spelunkers), hunters and trappers working in high-risk areas; and
2. If you are planning international travel to an area with a high-risk of rabies, the vaccination may be recommended by your doctor. It is not usually recommended for the general traveller. Contact a physician or the Health Unit's Travel Clinic at least 4 to 6 weeks in advance to allow enough time for any immunizations that may be needed. For questions about pre-exposure vaccine, contact the Thunder Bay District Health Unit's Travel Clinic at 625-8810 or toll-free at 1-888-294-6630, extension 8810.

WORKING TOGETHER TO PREVENT RABIES.

The Thunder Bay District Health Unit has important partners in the control and prevention of rabies in our district.

Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR)

The MNR is committed to the research, control and eradication of rabies throughout the province. It implements various strategies like the trapping, vaccination and releasing of wild animals. It also conducts widespread aerial vaccine baiting programs. For more information call the local office at 807-475-1471 or go online to www.mnr.gov.on.ca.

Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA)

CFIA investigates all wild and domestic animal exposures to rabies. It is often necessary for CFIA inspectors to quarantine domestic animals suspected of being exposed to a rabid animal. They also collect samples from animals suspected of having rabies and submit them for lab analysis. For more information on the CFIA, call 807-683-4370, or toll-free at 1-800-465-8509 or visit their website at <http://www.inspection.gc.ca>.

BE CAREFUL AROUND BATS!



WHY SHOULD I LEARN ABOUT BATS AND RABIES?

Awareness of the facts about bats and rabies can help people protect themselves, their families, and their pets. Here are some bat facts:

- **Most recent human rabies cases have been caused by rabies virus from bats.**
- Bats are not blind.
- They are neither rodents nor birds.
- They will not suck your blood.
- They play key roles in our ecosystems especially by eating insects, including agricultural pests.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I COME IN CONTACT WITH A BAT?

Bats have small teeth which may leave marks that are not easily seen. There are situations in which you should seek medical advice even in the absence of an obvious bite wound. For example:

- if you awaken and find a bat in your room,
- see a bat in the room of an unattended child, or
- see a bat near a mentally impaired or intoxicated person, you must seek medical advice immediately and have the bat tested.

If you are bitten by a bat -- or if blood or saliva from a bat gets into your eyes, nose, mouth, or a wound:

- 1 Wash the affected area thoroughly.
- 2 Contact your doctor and local Public Health Inspector immediately. If possible, keep the bat for laboratory rabies testing.

If a bat is in your home and you cannot rule out the possibility of exposure, leave the bat alone and contact your local veterinarian and Public Health Inspector immediately.

Never handle a bat without leather work gloves.

HOW CAN I KEEP BATS OUT OF MY HOME?

Bats should always be prevented from entering rooms of your home, camp, or other living areas.

Carefully examine your home for holes that might allow bats entry into your living quarters. Any openings larger than a quarter-inch by a half-inch should be caulked. Use window screens, chimney caps, and draft-guards beneath doors to attics, fill electrical and plumbing holes with stainless steel wool or caulking, and ensure that all doors to the outside close tightly.

Prevent bats from roosting in attics or buildings by covering outside entry points. Observe where the bats exit at dusk and exclude them by loosely hanging clear plastic sheeting or bird netting over these areas. Bats can crawl out and leave, but cannot re-enter.

After the bats have been excluded, the openings can be permanently sealed. See "Common Bat Entry Points" diagram on page 10.

Things to remember when "bat-proofing"

- During summer, many young bats are unable to fly. If you exclude adult bats during this time, the young may be trapped inside and die or make their way into living quarters. Thus, if possible, avoid exclusion from May through August.
- Most bats leave in the fall or winter to hibernate, so these are the best times to "bat-proof" your home.

The section entitled "Be Careful Around Bats" (pages 8–10 of this booklet) has been adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, United States Department of Health and Human Services, "Bats and Rabies, A Public Health Guide," http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/rabies/bats_&_rabies/bats&.htm#pdf_links. (Accessed 3/26/07).

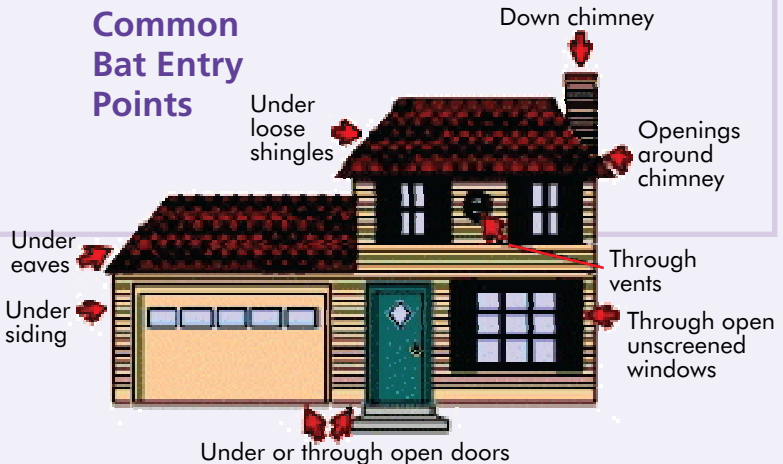
Case Study

In February 1995, the aunt of a 4-year-old girl was awakened by the sounds of a bat in the room where the child was sleeping. The child did not wake up until the bat was captured, killed, and discarded. The girl reported no bite, and no evidence of a bite wound was found when she was examined. One month later the child became sick and died of rabies. The dead bat was recovered from the yard and tested--it had rabies.

This case demonstrates several points:

- This child's infection with rabies was most likely the result of a bat bite. Children sleep heavily and may not awaken from the presence of a small bat. A bat bite can be superficial and not easily noticed.
- The bat was behaving abnormally. Instead of hiding, the bat was making unusual noises and was having difficulty flying. This strange behavior should have led to a strong suspicion of rabies.
- If the bat had been submitted for rabies testing, a positive test would have led to life-saving anti-rabies treatment.

Remember, in situations in which a bat is physically present and you cannot reasonably rule out having been bitten, safely capture the bat for rabies testing and seek medical attention immediately.



Questions relating to these guidelines
should be directed to:

Infectious Disease Program
Thunder Bay District Health Unit
1-888-294-6630, ext. 8318, 625-8318



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