

VACCINATE AGAINST RABIES

Rabies has been confirmed in raccoons, foxes, skunks, horses, bats, a dog, and a cat in recent years in our immediate mid-Michigan area. Unfortunately, all of these cases led to human exposure to rabies. The Michigan Department of Health urges Michigan veterinarians to promote rabies vaccination, especially in cats.

Nationwide, the majority of rabies are found in wild life, particularly in skunks, raccoons, foxes, and bats, and in farm animals. Among pets, dogs and cats are the most commonly infected species.

WHAT IS RABIES? Rabies, a viral disease of humans and all warm-blooded mammals, attacks the central nervous system causing death. Rabies is transmitted by a bite wound; the virus is found in the saliva of the infected animal.

WHEN DO SYMPTOMS OF RABIES DEVELOP? Usually signs of rabies develop two to twelve weeks after the bite. However, a severe bite to the head or face may cause signs of infection within ten days. There are rare cases in which a year or more has lapsed between the bite and signs of rabies.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF RABIES? There are two forms of rabies - 'furious' and 'dumb' - which have uniquely differing symptoms.

'Furious' rabies progresses through three stages. *Stage 1* is a departure from normal habits - either the animal will be unnaturally withdrawn or overly affectionate. This stage usually last two days. *Stage 2* is characterized by wandering far afield and biting everything in its path. This is the so-called 'mad' stage when the animal spreads the virus. *The 3rd stage* is characterized by a return home to die.

The '**dumb**' form of rabies differs from the one just described in that there is no roving or 'mad' period. Paralysis, usually of the lower jaw, is the first recognizable sign and may be confused with an obstruction in the throat or colic. The animal dies from paralysis.

WHAT SHOULD ONE DO IF BITTEN BY AN ANIMAL? Immediately wash the wound with soap and large quantities of water and contact your physician. An assessment of the risk of rabies must be made. Anti-rabies treatment is mandatory if the bite came from an animal known to have rabies or displaying certain suggestive signs. Treatment may be essential if the animal causing the injury is unavailable for examination. The law specifies a ten-day quarantine period for a dog making an unprovoked attack. Wild animals are killed and submitted for examination if they bite a human.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PREVENT RABIES? State laws require dogs to be vaccinated against rabies. Veterinarians recommend indoor as well as outdoor cats be vaccinated. Cats' hunting habits may expose them to rabid wild animals. Indoor cats should be vaccinated because bats and raccoons may invade houses and expose the cat to rabies.

WHAT ELSE CAN BE DONE? Obey leash and licensing laws, report stray dogs and cats to your county animal control, teach children to avoid strange animals, and do not keep wild animals for pets. There is no rabies vaccine licensed for use in wild animals.

HOW FREQUENTLY ARE CATS & DOGS VACCINATED? Puppies and kittens are vaccinated at four months of age and again one year later. Boosters are necessary every three years.