

Bites from Animals with Rabies

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Rabies is caused by the Rhabdovirus which affects the central nervous system. The incubation period for this virus is usually three to seven weeks, but can be as short as ten days. Common animals seen with rabies includes: raccoons, bobcats, skunks, bats, foxes, and coyotes. Even domestic animals as dogs and cats can be infected with rabies. Rabies is spread by the animal's saliva getting through open wounds such as bites. Sick animals have the following symptoms: loss of muscle control, loss of coordination, aggressive or docile behavior, plus they stop eating and drinking. Finally, the infected animal goes into a coma and has paralysis. Animals are infectious five to seven days before their deaths due to rabies

This article will include the symptoms a person experiences with an infectious animal bite, the care of the person following a bite, plus tips to avoid animals with rabies.

The person has a bite from an infectious animal. The person first experiences: fever, headache, sore throat, pain at the bite site, plus numbness, prickling, or tingling sensations. The incubation period post bite is 10 to 90 days, shorter if bitten in the face as compared to longer if bitten in hands, arms, legs, or feet. Later symptoms involve the nervous systems with the following symptoms: restlessness, bizarre behavior, hallucinations, disorientation, muscle spasms, spasms of the throat, severe pain with drinking, extreme excitability, convulsions, coma, and paralysis. Death occurs with respiratory arrest.

Immediate treatment of the wound is to clean the bite area with soap and water, then apply alcohol or iodine. Take the person immediately to a health care professional in the emergency room. Immediate treatment is important as there is better response to rapid treatment. Rabies immune globulin or antiserum is injected into the bite wound. Further treatment includes a series of rabies vaccines, injections of rabies immune globulin or rabies antiserum, plus a series of rabies vaccinations (five injections in the series). If possible, the live animal is examined to confirm rabies. The head of a dead animal is kept on ice until it can be examined to confirm rabies. Seek immediate treatment by the health care professions even if you do not have the live or dead animal.

Tips on avoiding bites from animals infected with rabies include:

- **Use caution against approaching unknown dogs, cats, and wild animals.**
- **Do not permit children to come in contact with these unknown or wild animals.**
- **Secure garbage to avoid attracting animals.**
- **Avoid contact with animals having bizarre behavior, especially severe aggression and animals that appear sick (especially with lots of saliva from the mouth).**