

# Rabies: Still a threat

Over the years, we've made progress preventing rabies in our furry friends, but we're not entirely in the clear just yet. There are still roughly 7,000 cases of animal rabies—mostly in wild animals—reported in the United States each year. Here are some tips from the American Veterinary Medical Association and World Rabies Day to keep you and your pets safe.

## What is rabies and how is it transmitted?

Rabies is a fatal disease caused by a virus that attacks the nervous system. It is transmitted via saliva from an infected animal, typically through a bite wound but occasionally through an open cut on the skin or the eyes, ears, or mouth of a person or animal.

## What animals can become infected with rabies?

Rabies is only seen in mammals, and most cases occur in wild animals—skunks, raccoons, bats, coyotes, and foxes are the most commonly infected in the wild. In recent years, cats have surpassed dogs as the most common domestic species to be infected with the virus, primarily because some cat owners don't vaccinate their cats or supervise them if they go outdoors.

## What are the clinical signs in animals?

The most common signs in dogs, cats, and ferrets are fearfulness, aggression, excessive drooling, difficulty swallowing, staggering, and seizures. Horses, cattle, sheep, and goats may also display those symptoms in addition to depression, self-mutilation, or hypersensitivity to light. Wild animals may only exhibit unusual behavior (for example, nocturnal animals seen wandering in the daytime).

## How can I prevent my pet from getting rabies?

- Vaccinate. All dogs, cats, ferrets, and horses should be vaccinated against rabies, along with livestock that are in frequent contact with humans.
- Spay and neuter. Pets should be spayed or neutered to



reduce their tendency to roam.

- Keep pets indoors when possible. Cats and ferrets should be kept indoors and dogs should be supervised when allowed outdoors.
- Avoid littering. Don't leave garbage or pet food outdoors, as it can easily attract dangerous wildlife.
- Keep out bats. Bat-proof your home and surrounding structures to prevent bats from gaining access to living spaces.

## What if my pet gets bitten?

- Seek help. Consult your veterinarian immediately. Contact animal control if your pet is bitten by a wild or stray animal.
- Revaccinate and/or quarantine. If your pet is up-to-date on its rabies vaccines, revaccinate immediately and keep the pet under close supervision for 45 days or more, as determined by state law or local ordinance. If your pet is not current on its rabies vaccine or has never been vaccinated, your pet may need to be euthanized or kept under strict quarantine for six months.

*Information courtesy of the American Veterinary Medical Association and World Rabies Day*