

What is rabies?

Rabies is a contagious disease found in mammals caused by the rabies virus.

How common is rabies?

Many wild and domestic mammals can have rabies. Skunks and bats are the most common animals to have rabies in Kansas. Rabbits, mice, rats, squirrels, opossums, and chipmunks are rarely infected, and their bites rarely call for treatment.

Human rabies cases are rare in the United States. The last human rabies case in Kansas was in 1968.

How do people become infected?

People usually get rabies from the bite of a rabid animal. In rare cases, people can get rabies through a non-bite exposure (e.g., scratch) or by coming into contact with infectious material from a rabid animal (e.g., saliva getting into eyes, nose, mouth, or open wound). Petting a rabid animal or contact with the blood, urine, or feces (poop) of a rabid animal is not considered exposure.

What are the signs and symptoms of rabies in humans?

Once someone with rabies begins experiencing these symptoms, they usually do not survive. For this reason, contact a healthcare provider right away if any animal bites you, especially a wild animal. The first symptoms include fever or headache. This quickly changes to nervous system symptoms, such as inability to sleep, uneasiness, confusion, slight or partial loss of muscle function, hallucinations (seeing things that are not real), agitation, excessive drooling, difficulty swallowing, and fear of water.

How long can rabies be spread?

After exposure, symptoms may show in several weeks or up to years (average one to three months). Both humans and animals are contagious as soon as they show symptoms until their death.

How is rabies treated?

There is no treatment for rabies. Exposed people can receive "post-exposure prophylaxis" which is a series of one dose of immune globulin and four doses of rabies vaccine over a 14-day period.

How can you prevent rabies?

The best way to prevent rabies is to vaccinate pets. This protects your pets and also protects you. Other steps to prevent illness include:

- Supervise your pets to avoid contact with wild animals.
- If you or your pet is bitten by a stray or wild animal, contact your healthcare provider or veterinarian right away.
- Call your local animal control department if:
 - You or your pet are bitten by a stray or wild animal.
 - To remove stray animals from your neighborhood.
- Avoid contact with unfamiliar animals. Teach children not to handle or pet unfamiliar animals, even if they appear friendly.