



Town of Greenwich Department of Health

FACT SHEET ON RABIES

WHAT IS RABIES?

Rabies is a deadly disease caused by a virus that attacks the nervous system. The virus is present in saliva and nervous system tissue of a rabid animal.

WHAT ANIMALS CAN GET RABIES?

Rabies is seen most often in wild mammals such as raccoons, bats, skunks, and foxes. Cats, dogs, and livestock can also get rabies if they are not protected by vaccination. Deer, and large rodents such as woodchucks, have been found rabid in areas affected by rabies.

Some animals almost never get rabies. These include rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks, rats, mice, guinea pigs, gerbils, and hamsters. They get rabies, but it almost never happens.

There are other animals that never ever get rabies. They are birds, snakes, fish turtles, lizards, and insects.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF RABIES IN AN ANIMAL?

Usually the first sign of rabies is a change in the animal's behavior. It may become unusually aggressive or unusually tame. The animal may lose fear of people and natural enemies. It may become excited, irritable and snap at anything in its path. Or, it may appear affectionate and friendly. Staggering, convulsions, spitting, choking, frothing at the mouth and paralysis are sometimes noted. Many animals have a marked change in voice. The animal usually dies within one week after showing signs of rabies.

HOW DO PEOPLE BECOME EXPOSED TO RABIES?

Generally, people are exposed to the rabies virus following the bite of an infected animal. Exposure may occur also if scratched by an infected animal or whenever saliva enters an open cut or mucous membrane (nose, mouth, eyes). Many Connecticut residents are unnecessarily exposed to the rabies virus after handling their pet after an attack and getting the saliva of the rabid animal on their hands.

Rabies virus infects the central nervous system, causing encephalopathy and ultimately death. Early symptoms of rabies in humans are nonspecific, consisting of fever, headache, and general malaise. As the disease progresses, neurological symptoms appear and may include insomnia, anxiety, confusion, slight or partial paralysis, excitation, hallucinations, agitation, hypersalivation, difficulty swallowing, and hydrophobia (fear of water). Death usually occurs within days of the onset of symptoms.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU ARE EXPOSED TO RABIES?

Wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water and seek medical attention immediately. Contact your physician and the Greenwich Department of Health immediately. Try to capture the animal without damaging its head or risking further exposure. Call the Greenwich Animal Control Division if help is needed.

If a rabies-suspect biting animal cannot be observed or tested, or it tests positive for rabies, treatment must begin immediately for exposed individuals. Human treatment consists of a dose of rabies immune globulin administered as soon as possible after exposure. The first of five doses of rabies vaccine is given at the same time, with the remaining injections given one each on days 3, 7, 14, and 28 following the initial injection.

Persons in high-risk occupations such as veterinarians, wildlife biologists, wildlife rehabilitators, animal control officers, and taxidermists should consider obtaining rabies pre-exposure vaccination which consists of three injections of rabies vaccine in the arm, the first two a week apart, and the third 14 to 21 days after. Periodic single boosters are generally required every two years if the risk of contact continues. A person already vaccinated and later exposed to rabies must receive two booster injections three days apart immediately after exposure.

WHAT IF MY PET IS EXPOSED TO A RABID ANIMAL?

If your pet has been in a fight with another animal, wear gloves to handle it. Isolate it from other animals and people for several hours. Call your veterinarian. Your vaccinated pet will need a booster dose of rabies vaccine within five days of the exposure. Unvaccinated animals exposed to a known rabid animal must be quarantined for six months or humanely destroyed. Unvaccinated animals exposed to a suspected rabid animal must be quarantined for three months and then strictly confined for an additional three months or humanely destroyed.

WHAT CAN PEOPLE DO TO PROTECT THEMSELVES AGAINST RABIES?

Do not feed, touch or adopt wild animals, stray dogs or cats. Enjoy wild animals from a distance.

Be sure your dogs and cats are up-to-date on their rabies vaccinations. Vaccinated pets serve as a buffer between rabid wildlife and man. Protect them, and you may reduce your risk of exposure to rabies. Vaccines for dogs and cats after three months of age are effective for a one-year period. Revaccinations can be effective for up to three years. Check with your veterinarian. Pets too young to be vaccinated should be kept indoors.

Keep family pets indoors at night. Don't leave them outside unattended or allow them to roam free.

Don't attract wild animals to your home or yard. Keep your property free of stored birdseed or other foods which may attract wild animals. Feed pets indoors. Tightly cap and secure garbage cans. Board up any openings to your attic, basement, porch or garage to eliminate entry. Cap your chimney with screens.

Encourage children to immediately tell an adult if they are bitten by an animal. Tell children not to touch any animal they do not know.

Report all animal bites or contact with wild animals to the Greenwich Department of Health and Greenwich Animal Control Division. If the animal is available for testing the Department will send it to the State of Connecticut Department of Public Health Laboratory. Note: Though there is no fee for human exposure rabies testing, there is a fee for non-human exposure rabies testing (i.e. testing a raccoon that was in a fight with your pet).

If a wild animal is on your property, let it wander away. Bring children and pets indoors and alert neighbors who are outside. You may contact a Nuisance Wildlife Control Officer who will remove the animal for a fee, or if it appears to be ill contact the Greenwich Animal Control Division

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT RABIES?

Contact the Greenwich Department of Health. It is a reliable source of additional rabies information, including the Greenwich response plan and details concerning animal submission and shipment for testing.

Greenwich Department of Health, Division of Environmental Services (by phone M-Fri 8-4)

Environmental Health:	622-7838
(Office Hours M-Fri 8-2:30PM):	
Laboratory:	622-7843
(Office Hours M-Fri 8-3PM):	

Greenwich Animal Control Division: 622-8299

Local Licensed Nuisance Wildlife Control Operators

Muldoon Wildlife Trapping:	861-2268
Peter Brooks	561-2396
Ace Trapping and Exterminating	629-9534

Websites of interest

CT DEP Wildlife Division:
<http://www.dep.state.ct.us/burnatr/wildlife/problem/nwco.htm>

Centers for Disease Control:
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/rabies/default.htm>