

## **Rabies and How it can be Controlled**

Man and all mammals are susceptible to rabies, which is almost invariably fatal.

The disease is transmitted by an infected animal's biting or licking. The virus enters the victim's body through a break in the skin, or rarely, through mucous membranes (eyes, nose, throat).

Rabies affects the central nervous system. It may take from ten days to over a year to develop; however, exposed people can be successfully treated before the development of symptoms by a series of vaccinations.

Rabies infection is detected by laboratory examination of the suspect brain tissue.

Wildlife rabies is a major source of infection for domestic animals, including pets. The disease may be transmitted to man either by infected wild or domestic animals.

Contrary to popular belief, rabies occurs in all seasons and in all sections of the country.

### **watch out for**

Bold, "friendly", or "apparently tame" wild animals.

Night animals, like skunks and foxes, that are seen in the daytime.

Pets that have difficulty walking, eating, or drinking.

Signs of excitement or viciousness in normally quiet animals.

Animals that tear at or scratch an old wound until it bleeds.

Cattle that "strain" for long periods.

Bats that are unable to fly.

### **rabid animals**

In the early stages, the personality of pets may change. A normally friendly dog may stay alone, another may begin to seek more attention. Some animals scratch at the place the virus entered their bodies.

Later, symptoms follow a "furious" pattern, a "dumb" (paralytic) pattern, or a combination of both.

"Furious" symptoms include excitement, viciousness, roaming, unusual noises, and a tendency to attack anything attracting the animal's attention. Such animals may snap at anything, including themselves. They tend to "drool", and their saliva may be mixed with blood. They may swallow objects such as stones and sticks. These symptoms progress to paralysis and, eventually death.

"Dumb" symptoms include difficulty in chewing, swallowing, and drinking, or trouble walking. An animal may not be able to close its mouth. People have been exposed by trying to clear the throats of such animals, which may seem to be choking. Paralysis spreads throughout the body until death. Parts paralyzed by rabies are limp, not rigid or stiff.

A veterinarian should be consulted immediately when any of the above signs are first noted.

If bitten by an animal, treat the bite as if the animal were rabid, and follow these steps. They may save your life.

- Identify the animal - by kind, size, color, and place. Caution children to seek the help of a policeman, school guard or other adult.
- Immediately cleanse the wound thoroughly by washing with soap and water. Rinse well and disinfect with alcohol, iodine, or other disinfectants. This lessens the chance of contracting rabies by removing or inactivating virus in the wound.
- See a doctor immediately after washing the wound. The physician will decide on need for treatment to prevent rabies.
- Report incident to the local health officer and animal control agency.
- If possible, have the biting dog or cat tested for rabies or placed under observation. If it is alive and normal after ten days of observation, the animal was not infective for rabies at the time of the bite.

**THE TEN DAY OBSERVATION PERIOD IS NOT VALID FOR ANIMALS OTHER THAN DOGS, CATS, AND DOMESTIC FERRETS BECAUSE NO INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE AS TO WHEN VIRUS IS EXCRETED IN THE SALIVA OF OTHER ANIMALS.**

### **Steps to Community Control of Rabies**

- Have dogs and cats over four months of age vaccinated by a veterinarian.
- Register and license all owned dogs and cats.
- Impound all stray dogs and cats.
- Appoint an animal control officer and provide pound or shelter facilities.
- Euthanize and test all biting dogs and cats or quarantine them for daily observation by a veterinarian for a period of ten days.
- Dogs and cats bitten by a known rabid animal should be destroyed immediately. If the owner is unwilling to have this done, the unvaccinated animal should be vaccinated immediately and placed in strict isolation for 90 days, and a "booster" vaccination given in the third and eighth weeks of isolation. If the animal is currently vaccinated, it should be revaccinated immediately and restrained (leashing and confinement) for 45 days.