Rabies in Maine

What is Rabies?
Rabies is a disease caused by the rabies virus. It affects the brain and spinal cord and can cause death if left untreated.

Rabies only infects mammals (animals with fur that produce milk).
Rabies in wild animals is common in Maine.
Commonly infected animals are raccoons, skunks, foxes, and bats.

How is Rabies Spread?
The rabies virus is found in the saliva, brain, and spinal cord of infected animals.

It is spread when an infected animal bites or deeply scratches a person or another animal.

Less commonly, it is spread when an infected animal's saliva, brain, or spinal cord tissue gets into a person or animal's mouth, nose, eyes, or cut in the skin.

If either of these things happens, it is considered a rabies exposure.

Rabies is NOT spread by:
- Blood
- Urine or feces
- Skunk spray
- Petting the fur of a rabid animal
- Touching dried saliva of a rabid animal
- Porcupine quills

You can't tell by looking at an animal if it has rabies.

Questions or concerns:
1-800-821-5821
Human Exposure to a Domestic Animal

1. Clean wounds with soap and water.
2. Call your local ACO.
3. Call your veterinarian.
4. The attacking domestic animal should be confined and observed for 10 days to rule out rabies under the ACO's supervision.
5. Rabies treatment is not needed if the cat or dog is alive and healthy 10 days after the exposure.

Human Exposure to a Wild Animal

1. Clean wounds with soap and water.
2. Call your local Game Warden.
3. Call your veterinarian.
4. The attacking wild animal should be submitted to HETL for rabies testing.
5. Your healthcare provider and/or Maine CDC will make recommendations about treatment while waiting for the rabies results of the wild animal.

Rabies Treatment

There is no treatment for rabies once symptoms develop. However, rabies is 100% preventable by 1) avoiding an exposure in the first place, and 2) seeking care after an exposure.

Rabies treatment after an exposure is called rabies PEP, or rabies post-exposure prophylaxis.

Contact your healthcare provider right away after a rabies exposure. He/she will tell you if you need rabies PEP.

Rabies PEP is a series of rabies vaccine and rabies immune-globulin, or RIG, shots.

The number and type of shots needed depends on a person’s health status, their weight, and whether he/she has been vaccinated for rabies in the past.

Preventing Rabies

Vaccinate your pets against rabies. By law, all dogs and cats—even indoor cats—must be vaccinated.

Avoid contact with all wild animals and animals that you do not know.

Do not handle sick or hurt wild animals; call your local ACO or Game Warden.

Bat-proof your home, camp, or building by contacting a trained exterminator.

Consider getting pre-exposure rabies vaccine if you are an ACO, veterinarian, veterinary technician, or wildlife rehabilitator.

If you have questions about rabies or a rabies exposure, call Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821.