

# Rabies Fact Sheet

## What is it?

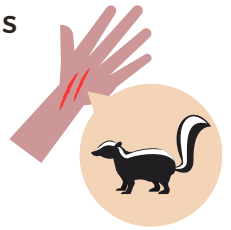
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Rabies is a preventable viral disease that infects the central nervous system (spinal cord and brain). It is almost always fatal once symptoms develop.

## How does it spread?

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The rabies virus can spread when an infected animal's saliva or brain/nervous system tissue gets into a person's broken skin or mucous membranes in the eyes, nose, or mouth. This can happen when an animal, with rabies, bites or scratches you.



In the U.S., rabies is mostly found in wild animals like:

- Bats
- Raccoons
- Skunks
- Foxes



In California, rabies is mostly found in bats and skunks.

## How do I know if I have it?

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If an animal, with rabies, bites or scratches you, it can take weeks or months for you to feel symptoms. It may feel like you have the flu, but your symptoms will become much worse with time.

The first symptoms you may have are:

- Fever
- Feeling weak
- Headache
- Itching at the bite



When the disease gets worse, you can have symptoms like:

- Confusion
- Scared of water
- Agitation
- Not able to sleep
- Anxiety
- See, feel, or hear things that don't exist



# How can I protect myself?

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The best way to protect yourself from rabies is to prevent bites from wild or unfamiliar animals. You can also protect yourself when you:

- Leave all wildlife alone.
- Ask to pet a person's dog.
- Get your pets vaccinated with the rabies vaccine.



Speak to your doctor about the pre-exposure rabies vaccine if you travel outside of the U.S., where rabies is common in dogs, or have regular contact with mammals or bats.

# How should I take care of myself or someone who was wounded by an animal?

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If you are bitten or scratched by an animal that can spread rabies, or have had direct contact with a bat, wash the area with soap and water. This will clean your wound and keep rabies germs from making you sick.

You will need to see a doctor for treatment as soon as possible. Your doctor will give you a dose of human rabies immune globulin (a fast-acting vaccine) and the rabies vaccine.

The rabies vaccine is a 4-dose series given on:

- Day 0 (day of the scratch or bite)
- Day 3
- Day 7
- Day 14



# When should I see a doctor?

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You should see a doctor if you wake up with a bat in your room because you may have been exposed to rabies. If you don't receive timely medical care after a potential rabies exposure, and before symptoms start, the virus can cause disease in the brain, ultimately resulting in death.

To learn more, visit the Rabies webpage at [www.sdepi.org](http://www.sdepi.org).