



# Rabies:

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is rabies?

Rabies is a preventable viral disease that affects the nervous system of mammals, including humans. It is most often spread through a bite of a rabid animal.

### What animals can get rabies?

Although any mammal can be affected, rabies is most common in wild animals such as raccoons, skunks, foxes, and bats. It is rare for rabbits and small rodents to be infected with the rabies virus. Cats are the most common domestic animal diagnosed with rabies. Most human rabies cases in the United States are associated with exposure to bats.

### What should I do if I find a bat in my home?

Use the steps below to capture the bat safely and contact the Onondaga County Health Department Bureau of Animal Disease Prevention immediately at 315.435.3165 to arrange for rabies testing of the bat. Do not release the bat.

### *How to Catch a Bat*

1. Wear gloves and do not touch the bat
2. Keep the bat confined to one room (close the door, windows, and closet doors)
3. Turn on the lights if the room is dark
4. Wait for the bat to land and cover the bat with a coffee can or container (do not damage the bat's head)
5. Slide a piece of cardboard under the can trapping the bat
6. Tape the cardboard tightly to the can
7. Use a net or long pole with a piece of duct tape (sticky side out) to capture the bat, if necessary
8. Do not use glue board to capture the bat (it cannot be easily removed for rabies testing)
9. Immediately contact the Bureau of Animal Disease Prevention at 315.435.3165 to arrange testing of the bat.

*Watch a video: [https://youtu.be/\\_YhnV5WJQBA](https://youtu.be/_YhnV5WJQBA)*



### What are signs of rabies in animals?

Signs of rabies are different among different animals, they may include:

- Unusual behavior
- Change in the voice of the animal
- Signs of paralysis (weakness), a hard time swallowing, and a lot of salivation
- Acting lethargic (very weak), may have convulsions, and/or may die

### How do you know if an animal has rabies?

Diagnosis of rabies is made by examination of brain tissue **after** the animal dies. There is no way to know if a living animal has rabies. The Onondaga County Health Department sends the animal for rabies testing.

## How does a human get rabies?

A person can get rabies by a bite or a scratch from an animal that has rabies when a rabid animal's saliva gets on an open wound or in a mucous membrane, or receiving an organ or tissue transplant from a donor infected with rabies.

## What should I do if I come into contact with suspect rabid animals?

First, wash all wounds with soap and water and immediately get medical treatment. Next, call the Onondaga County Health Department's Bureau of Animal Disease Prevention at 315.453.3165 for guidance.

## If my pet is currently vaccinated for rabies, why would it be put under quarantine?

When an animal is under quarantine, it is kept alone and not with others. Healthy dogs, cats, ferrets, and livestock that have bitten (or caused a potential human exposure to rabies) will be confined for a ten day observation period. If the animal remains healthy during this time, the animal is considered not contagious for rabies at the time of the bite. **If the animal was not current on its rabies vaccine at the time of the bite, the animal must be vaccinated after a ten day confinement period.** If the animal is a stray or the owner doesn't want to quarantine the animal, it must be euthanized and submitted for rabies testing.

## What happens to my pet if it is bitten or scratched by an animal with rabies?

The following is likely:

- If your pet is current on its rabies vaccine, your pet must get a booster shot. This shot must be given within five days of being bitten or scratched. No quarantine will be necessary.
- If the animal's rabies vaccine is late (past due), the animal can be euthanized (put to sleep to die) or put in a strict six month quarantine. With this option, the animal must be vaccinated at the beginning of the quarantine period.
- If the animal has never been vaccinated for rabies and comes in contact with an animal with rabies, the Bureau of Animal Disease Prevention requires the animal be euthanized.

## What am I required to do if six month quarantine is approved for my pet?

Your animal will be quarantined at a veterinarian hospital of your choice or at your home. If the at-home quarantine is approved by the Bureau of Animal Disease Prevention, the animal will need to be kept in a locked enclosure inside the home. Quarantine directions will be given by the Bureau of Animal Disease Prevention based on the animal's rabies shot history and the owner's willingness to follow quarantine directions. The Bureau of Animal Disease Prevention will check on your animal each month. At the end of the six month quarantine, the animal will need to be examined by a veterinarian of your choice.

If your animal starts to show signs of rabies during the six month quarantine period, your animal must be brought to a veterinarian immediately to be euthanized and then submitted for rabies testing. The Bureau of Animal Disease Prevention must be notified by the veterinarian. Please contact the Bureau of Animal Disease Prevention with any questions at 315.435.3165.

## How can I protect my pet against rabies?

New York State Public Health Law states that any cat or dog must be given a rabies vaccine at three months of age, a booster at one year of age, and every three years after that. Ferrets must be vaccinated every year for rabies. Animals too young to be vaccinated for rabies should stay indoors. If the animal goes outside before being vaccinated for rabies, it should be under the direct supervision of an adult to ensure no rabies exposure occurs.

For more information, visit:

[www.ongov.net/health/env/rabies.html](http://www.ongov.net/health/env/rabies.html)

