

# Bites and Your Pet

## If your pet bites someone:

1. Report the bite to the local health department or animal control office. If your pet is a dog, cat or ferret you will probably be asked to confine the animal and watch it closely for 10 days.
2. Tell the person bitten to see a doctor immediately and to follow the advice in this brochure.
3. Check with your veterinarian to determine if your pet's vaccinations are up-to-date.
4. Don't let your pet roam off of your property and don't give the animal away. It must be available for observation by public health authorities.
5. Don't kill your pet or allow it to be killed unless you have been instructed to do so by the public health authorities.
6. AFTER the recommended observation period, have your pet vaccinated for rabies if it does not have a current rabies vaccination.



**Domestic animals are most likely to get infected with rabies due to contact with wild animals.**

## If you think your pet has been exposed to rabies:

1. Follow the instructions in the "If You Are Bitten" section of this brochure for capturing or at least identifying the animal that may have exposed your pet and not damaging that animal's head.
2. Contact your local health department or animal control office for further instructions.
3. Call your veterinarian for advice about wound care and to check on your pet's vaccination status.

# What You Can Do!



**V**accinate your dogs, cats, ferrets and selected livestock for rabies. Keep the vaccinations up-to-date. Vaccinating animals is probably the single most effective way to protect yourself and your pets from rabies!



**R**eport to the local health department or animal control authorities if your pet is attacked or bitten by a wild animal.



**R**estrict your animals on your property. Don't let pets roam free. Also, don't leave garbage or pet food outside. It may attract wild or stray animals.



**N**ever keep wild animals as pets. Do not approach stray domestic animals or wild animals.

- If you think a wild animal needs help, call the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries or a licensed, wildlife rehabilitator for guidance ([www.dgif.virginia.gov](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov)).
- Stray domestic animals, especially if they appear ill or injured, should be brought to the attention of local animal control authorities. If you think a stray animal needs help, contact your local animal control office for guidance.

**For more information contact your local health department or visit:  
[www.vdh.virginia.gov](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov)**

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Division of Environmental Epidemiology  
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# Rabies &



# Animal Bites



**VDH** VIRGINIA  
DEPARTMENT  
OF HEALTH  
*Protecting You and Your Environment*  
[www.vdh.virginia.gov](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov)

# Rabies - The Facts

Rabies is a deadly disease caused by a virus that attacks the nervous system. It is almost always fatal, unless preventive treatment is administered **before symptoms develop**. *It's important to seek medical attention promptly after being exposed!*

The rabies virus is in the saliva and the brain of rabid animals. It can be transmitted through a bite or by getting saliva or brain tissue in the eyes, nose, mouth or in an open wound. Rabies cannot be transmitted by blood, feces, urine or by just petting an animal.

A rabies-infected animal may act normal. Do not rely on how healthy an animal looks to determine if you or your pet has been exposed!



**Bites are the most common way rabies spreads!**

Only mammals get rabies; birds, fish, reptiles and amphibians do not. Wild animals frequently diagnosed with rabies are raccoons, skunks and foxes. Cats are the most common domestic animal diagnosed with rabies. Rabbits, squirrels, rats and mice and small pets like gerbils and hamsters seldom get rabies.

Rabies can be prevented in cats, dogs, ferrets and some livestock with rabies vaccination. Even if an oral wildlife rabies vaccine is being used as part of a rabies control program in your area, this does not eliminate the need for vaccination of pets or other domestic animals.



## Special Care Around Bats

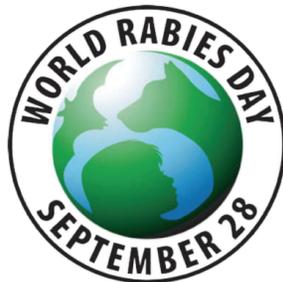
While bats play a key role in the environment, most recent human rabies cases in the U.S. have been caused by bats, so, to avoid being bitten, avoid direct contact with bats, especially any bat that is active by day or is unable to fly.

People can be exposed to rabies by bats without ever knowing they were bitten. Seek medical advice even in the absence of an obvious bite wound if you find a bat in a room with a:

- Sleeping person
- Unattended, small child
- Someone mentally or physically challenged
- Intoxicated person



Bats that may have exposed people or animals to rabies, should be collected safely for possible testing (or at least not released). Bats may be contained in a room by closing windows and door(s). Use caution if you try to capture a bat yourself by wearing gloves and using a container (like a coffee can or a box) to place over the bat and then sliding and securing a piece of cardboard between the container and the bat. Call your local health department for advice about testing and medical care. A local health department directory can be found at [www.vdh.virginia.gov/LHD](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/LHD).



Rabies kills, thousands of people worldwide each year!

## If You Are Bitten

**Don't panic...but don't ignore** the bite either. To decrease the chance of infection, wash the wound thoroughly with soap and lots of water. Give first aid as you would for any wound.

If it can be done safely, capture or confine the animal or at least identify it before it runs away. Don't try to pick the animal up. If the animal is owned, get the name and contact information for the owner. Call an animal control or law enforcement officer for further instructions.

Don't damage the head of any animal that might need to be tested for rabies. The brain will be needed for the test.



**Notify your doctor immediately** and explain how you were bitten. Tell your doctor whether or not the bite has been reported to local authorities. Your doctor may want to call the health department to discuss whether or not you need to start the rabies vaccine series and will help address other concerns about the bite. Rabies treatment no longer involves injections in the abdomen and most are given in the arm.

**Report the bite to your local health department.**