

## IF YOUR PET HAS BITTEN SOMEONE

- ◆ Tell the person bitten to see a doctor immediately and to follow the advice on the previous pages. Report the bite to the local health department. If your pet is a dog, cat, or ferret they will probably have you confine the animal and watch it closely for 10 days. Report any illness or unusual behavior to your local health department and veterinarian immediately.



- ◆ Don't let the animal stray, and don't give the animal away. It must be available for observation by public health authorities.
- ◆ Don't kill your pet or allow it to be killed unless you have been instructed to do so by the public health authorities.
- ◆ **After** the recommended observation period, have your pet vaccinated for rabies if it does not have a current rabies vaccination.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP CONTROL RABIES

- ◆ Have your veterinarian vaccinate your dogs, cats, ferrets, and selected livestock. Keep the vaccinations up-to-date.
- ◆ If your pet is attacked or bitten by a wild animal, report it to the local health or animal control authorities. Be sure your vaccinated dog, cat, or ferret receives a booster vaccination.
- ◆ Limit the possibility of exposure by keeping 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.
- ◆ Remember . . . wild animals should not be kept as pets. They are a potential rabies threat to their owners and to others. Enjoy all wild animals from a distance, **even if they seem friendly**. A rabid animal sometimes acts tame. If you see an animal acting strangely, report it to the city or county animal control department. **Don't go near it yourself.**
- ◆ Remember, wildlife is a part of our natural heritage. Enjoy it, respect it ... at a distance for the benefit of all concerned.
- ◆ For more information, contact your local health department or visit the following website:

[www.vdh.virginia.gov/epi/rabies.asp](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/epi/rabies.asp)



Office of Epidemiology  
Division of Zoonotic & Environmental Epidemiology  
109 Governor Street, Suite 516-EAst  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

4/04

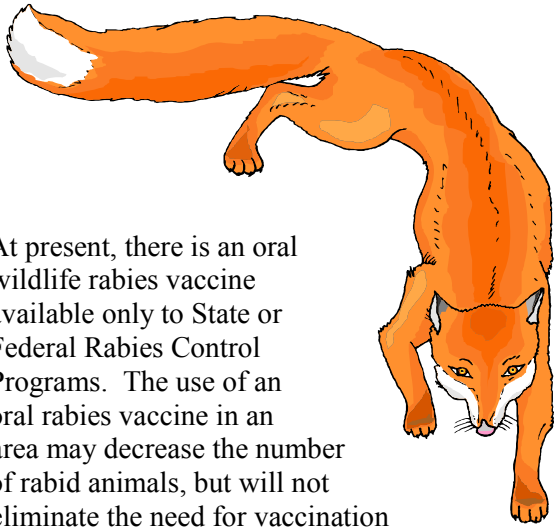
# Rabies and Animal Bites



## What You Should Know and What You Should Do

## FACTS ABOUT RABIES

- ◆ Rabies is a deadly disease caused by a virus that attacks the nervous system. It kills almost any mammal or human that gets sick from it.
- ◆ The rabies virus is mainly in the saliva and brain of rabid animals. It can be transmitted through a bite or by getting saliva or brain tissue in a wound; rarely by getting virus in the eye or mouth.
- ◆ Only mammals get rabies; birds, fish, reptiles, and amphibians do not. Skunks, bats, foxes, raccoons, dogs, cats, and some farm animals are most likely to get rabies. Rabbits, squirrels, rats and mice, and small pets like gerbils and hamsters seldom get it.
- ◆ Rabies can be prevented in cats, dogs, ferrets, and some livestock with a rabies vaccination. For most wild and exotic animals, there are no rabies vaccines available that have been shown to protect them.



- ◆ At present, there is an oral wildlife rabies vaccine available only to State or Federal Rabies Control Programs. The use of an oral rabies vaccine in an area may decrease the number of rabid animals, but will not eliminate the need for vaccination of pets or other domestic animals.

## RABIES AND HUMANS

- ◆ Because of improved rabies vaccination programs for pets and better treatment for people who are bitten, rabies cases among humans in this country are rare. The best way to prevent the spread of rabies to humans is by keeping pets properly vaccinated.

## BATS AND RABIES

- ◆ Most of the recent human rabies cases in the United States have been caused by rabies virus from bats. Any bat that is active by day, is found in a place where bats are not usually seen, or is unable to fly, is far more likely than others to be rabid. Therefore, it is best to not handle bats.



- ◆ Most people know when they have been bitten by a bat, but there are situations in which you should seek medical advice even in the absence of an obvious bite wound. For example, if you awaken and find a bat in your room, see a bat in the room of an unattended child, or see a bat near a mentally impaired or intoxicated person, do not destroy or throw away the bat. Call your local health department for advice on how to have the bat tested and whether anyone needs medical care.

## IF YOU'VE BEEN BITTEN

- ◆ **Don't panic** . . . but don't ignore the bite, either. Wash the wound thoroughly with soap and lots of water. Washing thoroughly will greatly lessen the chance of infection. Give first aid as you would for any wound.
- ◆ If possible, capture the animal under a large box or can, or at least identify it before it runs away. **Don't** try to pick the animal up. Call an animal control or law enforcement officer to come get it.
- ◆ If it's a wild animal that must be killed, don't damage the head. The brain will be needed to test for rabies. Don't let anyone destroy wild animals at random just because there may be a rabies outbreak in your area. Only a few wild animals will be carrying rabies.
- ◆ It's critically important that you notify your family doctor immediately and explain how you got the bite. Your doctor will want to know if the animal has been captured. If necessary, your doctor will give the anti-rabies treatment recommended by the United States Public Health Service. Your doctor will also treat you for other possible infections that could be caused from the



- ◆ **Report the bite to the local health department**