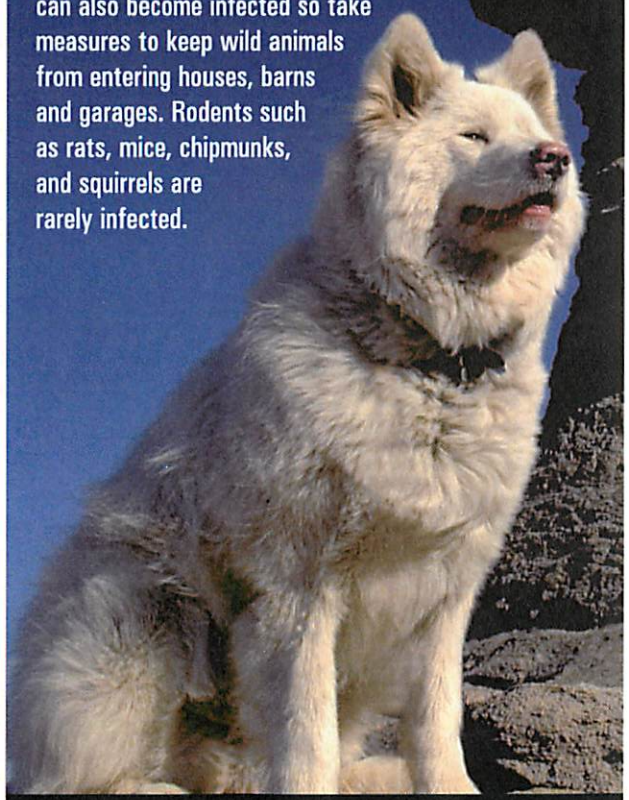
What is rabies?

Rabies is a deadly disease caused by a virus. The virus is found in the saliva of a rabid animal and is transmitted by a bite, or possibly by contamination of an open cut. Left untreated, rabies attacks the nervous system and causes death.

What animals get rabies?

Only mammals, including people, can get rabies. Rabies occurs most often in wildlife, particularly raccoons, bats, skunks, groundhogs, and foxes. These animals represent 95% of the cases in the United States. (NOTE- It is illegal in NJ to keep these animals as pets)

In NJ, cats account for the vast majority of domestic animal rabies cases. Farm animals, dogs, and other domestic pets can also become infected so take measures to keep wild animals from entering houses, barns and garages. Rodents such as rats, mice, chipmunks, and squirrels are rarely infected.



Avoid contact with stray or wild animals

Rabid animals are usually either vicious and aggressive, or may appear to be drunk and have trouble walking. Some animals may be rabid even though they appear to be normal. People should stay away from all wild and stray animals which are aggressive or appear to be sick.

If you are bitten by a potentially rabid animal:

- Clean the wound immediately with soap and water
- Seek medical attention right away
- Report the bite to the local health department

If you are bitten by a wild animal:

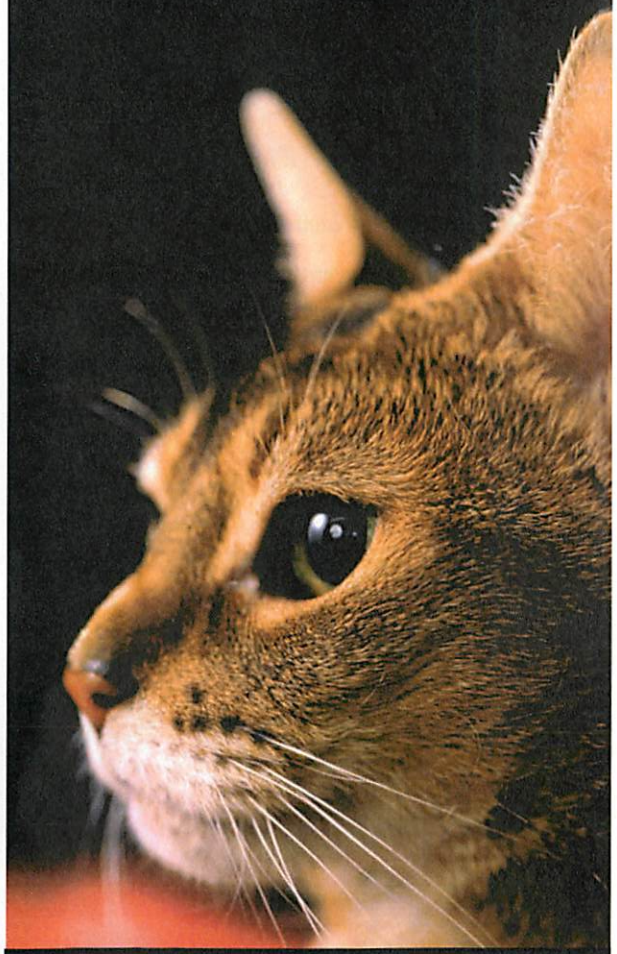
- Try to contain the animal while taking care to prevent additional bites and exposure to saliva. Contact the animal control officer or local police for assistance. In the event the animal is euthanized, care should be taken to avoid damage to the brain, which should be submitted to the state rabies laboratory for testing.
- Human treatment to prevent rabies may be started immediately or delayed until the testing results are known.
- If the animal is not available for testing, the decision to start human treatment will be made by the bite victim and his/her physician based on recommendations by the local health department.

If you are bitten by a dog, cat, or other domestic animal:

- Get information about the pet including owner's name, phone, address, description of the animal, and its vaccination status.
- Biting animals should be observed for 10 days to ensure that they are free of rabies. If showing signs of rabies, the animal should be euthanized immediately and tested. If the animal dies during the observation period, it must be submitted for testing.
- Bites from other domestic animals (such as horses, cows, goats, and sheep) will be evaluated by your local health department. The animals can usually be observed for 10 days to rule out the possibility of rabies.

How can I protect my pets?

Vaccination and animal control programs have helped to prevent rabies in most pets. It is important to keep your dog or cat up-to-date on rabies vaccinations. Cats and dogs that spend time outdoors may have more risk of coming into contact with a rabid wild animal, but it is important to also vaccinate pets that stay indoors. In the United States, there have been more cases of rabies in cats than in dogs in recent years. Therefore, rabies vaccination is especially important for cats. See your veterinarian for more information or take your pets to state/municipal-sponsored rabies clinics.



Vaccinate your pets against Rabies

If your pet has bitten someone...

- Urge the victim to seek medical care immediately.
- Check with your veterinarian to see if your pet's vaccinations are up-to-date.
- Report the bite to your local health department.
- Report any unusual illness or behavior from your pet to the local health department and veterinarian.
- Don't let your pet free-roam and don't give your pet away. The animal must be available for observation.
- After the recommended observation period, have your pet vaccinated for rabies if it is overdue.

If your pet has been bitten by a potentially rabid animal...

- Call your veterinarian immediately.
- Even if your pet is currently vaccinated against rabies, it will need to be vaccinated again.
- Unvaccinated pets exposed to a rabid animal may need to be euthanized (put to sleep) immediately, or placed in strict isolation for six months and then vaccinated prior to release.

REMEMBER!

- Vaccinate your pets against rabies
- Do not feed or touch wild animals
- Avoid contact with strays or pets other than your own
- Report unusual behavior in stray or wild animals to municipal animal control
- Report all bites immediately to your local health department

About BATS

- Less than 1% of bats carry rabies and attacks by bats are extremely rare
- Take measures to keep bats out of your home
- Contact your veterinarian if your pet has been bitten by a bat
- Unusual behavior, such as a bat fluttering on the floor, or a bat flying in midday, is reason for particular care to avoid the bat
- Whenever a bat is found in a home or business, it should be contained in a room until removed by the animal control officer

For more information visit:

http://nj.gov/health/cd/rabies/index.shtml

New Jersey Department of Health & Senior Services
Communicable Disease Service
609-826-4872

C1661

What you should know about RABIES

NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT of HEALTH and SENIOR SERVICES