



**AGCJ 404: Communicating Agricultural Information to the Public**  
**Fact Sheet Assignment**  
**Fall Semester 2008**

## The Human Risk Factor: Rabies

### What is rabies?

Rabies is a fatal disease that both wildlife, domestic animals, and even humans are capable of contracting. Although rabies outbreaks are not as common as they used to be, rabies still continues to be an area of concern for physicians, veterinarians, and epidemiologists.

While there continues to be research about the disease and its effects, there are still many unanswered questions. Until there is a cure and the United States becomes rabies free, like most European countries, rabies will be a threat to animals and humans alike.

### How is rabies transmitted?

There are many different carriers of this disease but bats, raccoons, and skunks are the most common transmitters.



Source: <http://sciencenotes.files.wordpress.com>

Spending a lot of time outdoors, either with a job or for leisure, puts those at greater risk for acquiring this disease. For those who own a pet such as a cat or a dog, it is also important to keep them up to date on their rabies vaccines.

Rabies is transmitted by an infected animal via:

- Contact with the nervous system
- Contact with mucous membranes
- Saliva deposits
- Contamination of wounds

Even though a large number of rabies cases are attributed to wildlife, domesticated

animals are also a threat. Bites by an unvaccinated dog or cat pose a huge risk to humans and are another common transmitter of the disease.



Source: <http://www.houstonist.com/>

### What are the symptoms of rabies?

Rabies is a rapid progression disease which means that once symptoms emerge, a painful death will soon follow. The normal time frame from onset of symptoms to death ranges from about three to eight days. After symptoms appear, the window of opportunity for treatment is also lost. Clinical signs of infection include:

- Flu-like symptoms
- Behavioral changes
- Disorientation
- Mental confusion
- Vicious and erratic manner

The incubation time for the virus typically lasts a few weeks or months depending on the host and the strain.

### Is there a cure?

At this time, there is no definite cure for rabies once symptoms have appeared. However, if exposure to the disease is suspected and is caught early, immediate treatment can be rendered. The treatment, a vaccine regiment

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called Postexposure Prophylaxis, or PEP for short includes an initial rabies immune injection followed by a series of five doses of the rabies vaccine given in a one month period. Although the treatment is effective, it is very costly, painful, and time consuming.

### Is rabies a concern for humans?

In the past decades, the human concern for rabies has declined due in part to treatment regimes and strict vaccine laws for domestic animals. While some cases of human rabies exposure have been linked to children's camps and organ donation, the rate of exposure still remains relatively low.

#### **FAST FACT**

Only 31 cases of human rabies in the United States were reported between 1990 and 2003.

### What needs to be done in cases of suspected rabies?

In those cases where rabies exposure is suspected these key steps can be followed:

- If bitten, catch the suspected animal
- Contact a doctor or hospital immediately
- Begin PEP treatment



Source: [img256.imageshack.us/](http://img256.imageshack.us/)

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