

Rabies on the Farm

What is rabies?

Rabies is a fatal neurologic disease caused by a virus that is spread through saliva. Typically the virus is spread when a rabid animal bites another animal or human. The virus is fragile and quickly killed by sunlight or air, which means contact with things a rabid animal has touched (e.g., water bowls, bedding) is not a rabies risk. Though there is no cure after symptoms of the disease appear, a series of shots after exposure to the saliva of a rabid animal will prevent rabies.

Which animals carry rabies in Minnesota?

Skunks and bats are the wild animals that most often carry rabies in Minnesota. Dogs, cats, horses, cattle, and other domestic animals usually become infected after being bitten by a rabid skunk. People are generally exposed to rabies by bats, dogs, cats or livestock.

Animals that are **NOT** a rabies risk in Minnesota: hamsters, guinea pigs, gerbils, rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks, rats, and mice.

What should I do if one of my animals is bitten by a skunk or other wild animal?

- The skunk or other wild animal should be killed and submitted for rabies testing. Don't shoot the animal in the head because the brain is needed for rabies testing.
- Work with your veterinarian to have the animal submitted for rabies testing or contact the Minnesota Veterinary Diagnostic Lab (VDL) directly at 612-625-8787.
- Consult your veterinarian or the Board of Animal Health at 651-201-6808 regarding any concerns you have for your animals.

What should I do if someone is bitten by a wild or domestic animal?

- Wash the bite immediately with soap and water. Thorough cleaning is the most effective way to prevent infections after animal bites.
- Contact your doctor to assess the need for rabies shots. Other infections, such as tetanus, may also result from a bite wound and may require medical attention.
- Livestock, dogs, cats, or ferrets that have bitten someone should be confined and observed for 10 days from the date of the bite. If the animal becomes ill during the 10-day period, it should be evaluated by a veterinarian immediately.
- Wild animals that bite people should be captured, euthanized, and tested for rabies. Again, work with your veterinarian or call the VDL directly about how to submit the animal for rabies testing.

The special case of bats

- If anyone is bitten by a bat, has physical contact with a bat, wakes up to a bat in their bedroom or finds a bat with a previously unattended young child or an incapacitated adult, the bat should be captured and submitted for rabies testing.
- Bats have very small teeth so you may not see any bites marks.
- Call the Minnesota Department of Health at 651-201-5414 for advice about bat contact or animal bites.

How can rabies be prevented?

- Vaccinate your pets (dogs, cats, ferrets) against rabies and keep them current.
- Vaccinate your prize cattle, sheep, and horses against rabies.
- Vaccinated animals protect the animals and people on your farm.