

Keeping Safe from

RABIES



## Rabies is a deadly disease.

It is caused by a virus that attacks the nervous system of mammals (warm-blooded animals with fur that nurse their young). Pets, livestock, wildlife and people are all at risk.

### Rabies continues to be a serious problem

throughout many parts of the United States and is enzootic (present in the wildlife) in North Carolina. Several species of wildlife are reservoirs. That means they carry the disease and spread it to animals and humans. The wildlife most commonly infected with rabies virus in North Carolina are:

- Raccoons,
- Bats,
- Skunks,
- Bobcats,
- Red and gray foxes,
- Coyotes,
- Beavers, and
- Groundhogs (woodchucks)



***Stray dogs or puppies, cats or kittens, and ferrets may be infected with the rabies virus through contact with wild animals.***



## How is rabies spread?

**Rabies is spread *mainly* through bites from infected animals.**

The disease can be spread in other ways, too.

The rabies virus is found in the saliva and nervous tissue of infected animals. An animal or human can be infected with rabies when saliva or nervous tissue from a rabid animal enters:

- Open fresh wounds
- Mucous membranes (the thin moist tissue that lines the eyes, nose, mouth, etc.)

Uncommon routes of spread include infection through corneal or organ transplants from an infected person; and airborne rabies virus infection in laboratory workers and cavers (bats).

## Steps you can take to protect you, your family, and your animals

- **Avoid contact with all wild animals.** Do not approach, feed, or handle any wild animals. NEVER keep wild animals as pets.
- **Avoid contact with all stray, feral or unfamiliar dogs, cats and ferrets.**
- **Report strays and wild animals showing unusual behavior** to your local animal control authority or local health department.
- **Protect your home from wildlife and bats.** Secure doors, windows, and maintain screens on windows and doors. Cap chimneys. Seal any opening to attics, basements and home interior.

- **Secure trash;** use animal-proof containers.

- **Do not feed pets outside. Do not store or leave open pet food outside.**

## Keeping Your Animals Safe Keeps You Safe!

- **Visit your veterinarian regularly and keep your cats, dogs and ferrets currently vaccinated against rabies.**  
N.C. General Statute 130A-185 requires that all dogs, cats and ferrets in North Carolina be vaccinated against rabies by four months of age.



- Livestock that are valuable and/or have frequent contact with humans (like at petting zoos, fairs, public exhibitions), as well as horses traveling interstate, should be currently vaccinated against rabies.



- **Confine your animals to your property.**
- **If your animal is bitten or attacked by another animal,** contact your local animal control officer and your veterinarian. A rabies booster is required within 5 days of a bite to protect your currently vaccinated pet (N.C. General Statute 130A-197). Livestock producers should contact the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services regarding rabies exposures, vaccinations and quarantine procedures.

## Know the signs of rabies

***AVOID any animal (wild or domestic) that is showing unusual behavior.***

Report these animals to your local health department or local animal control authority immediately.



## There are two common forms of rabies:

- **Dumb rabies:**  
The animal may be shy or hide; be unusually approachable: slow, depressed and confused.
- **Furious rabies:**  
The animal may show erratic behavior: be excitable, irritable, or aggressive, or confused and calm; or suddenly attack when approached.

## Other Signs

- Daytime activity in animals normally active at night
- A change in the sound of the animal's voice
- Staggering, weakness or paralysis
- Inability to eat or drink
- Drooling

- Convulsions and frothing at the mouth

Ultimately rabies ends in paralysis, coma and death.

## Know what to do if you are bitten by a wild or stray animal, or a pet

1. **Wash the wound** thoroughly with soap and irrigate with warm water for 15 minutes.
2. **For wild animals and stray dogs or cats**, call animal control at once for safe capture. Only confine the animal if this can be done safely, and if it is necessary to kill the animal, do not damage the head. An intact brain is needed for rabies testing.

3. **For pets**, write down the owner's name and address. Ask for proof of current rabies vaccination.
4. **Contact your physician** to determine if you need treatment like rabies postexposure prophylaxis, a tetanus shot, or antibiotics. According to N.C. General Statute 130A-196, physicians who treat a person bitten by an animal known to be a potential carrier of rabies are required to report the incident within 24 hours to the local health department.
5. **Report the animal bite** to the local health department or animal control authority. A dog, cat or ferret that bites a person has to be captured, confined and observed for 10 days.

## For more information about rabies prevention and control, contact:

- Your veterinarian
- Local animal control authority
- Local health department

### North Carolina Division of Public Health Veterinary Public Health Program

During business hours:

**919-733-3410**

After hours:

**919-733-3419**

Email:

**DPH.vetpublichealth@dhhs.nc.gov**

## Stop Rabies!

When your veterinarian purchases rabies tags from NCDHHS the proceeds support rabies educational efforts in North Carolina!.



State of North Carolina  
Department of Health and Human Services  
Division of Public Health

[www.rabies.ncdhhs.gov/epi/vet.html](http://www.rabies.ncdhhs.gov/epi/vet.html)

N.C. DHHS is an equal opportunity employer and provider. 7/10