

ANIMAL BITES AND RABIES

Rabies is a viral disease transmitted through the saliva of an infected mammal to others. Rabies is routinely found in Georgia. Wild animals, such as raccoons, skunks, bats, and foxes, have the highest risk of transmission. Vaccinated animals have a much lower risk of transmission than unvaccinated animals.

Possible Signs and Symptoms

Once signs and symptoms begin, there is no treatment for rabies and it is almost always fatal.

If you suspect that you have been exposed to rabies, get vaccinated immediately and do not wait to see if signs and symptoms develop.

Signs and symptoms in animals include:

- General sickness.
- Excessive drool/saliva.
- Unusual aggressiveness.
- Paralysis or difficulty moving.
- A wild animal acting unusually tame.



How Can I Prevent a Rabies Infection?

- Vaccinate your pets on time.
- Keep your pets on a leash in areas where contact with wild animals is possible,
- Limit contact with strange or wild animals.
 - If you see a wild animal acting strangely, contact DeKalb County Animal Enforcement Services.
- If you work with animals frequently, consider rabies pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP).
- If you get bitten or scratched by an animal:
 - Cleanse the wound promptly and thoroughly.
 - Seek medical attention.
 - Call DeKalb County Animal Enforcement Services (404-294-2996x2).
 - Call DeKalb County Board of Health Epidemiology (404-508-7870) for information on rabies PEP.

Rabies Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) Series

Rabies is 100% preventable in humans by vaccination.

PEP should be started as soon as possible after exposure, though it can be started any time before symptom onset. The doses should be as close to the vaccine schedule as possible.

The Rabies PEP Vaccine Schedule is as follows:

Day 0: One dose of rabies vaccine and one dose of human rabies immune globulin, must be given at the Emergency Room.

Day 3: One dose of rabies vaccine.

Day 7: One dose of rabies vaccine.

Day 14: One dose of rabies vaccine.



Doses for days 3, 7, and 14 may be administered at an urgent care center, at an Emergency Room, by a physician, or at the DeKalb County Board of Health.

Immunocompromised individuals may need an additional 5th dose on day 28.

For questions regarding your specific situation or to book a rabies vaccine appointment with the DeKalb County Board of Health, please contact DeKalb County Board of Health Epidemiology Staff (404-508-7870).

This is general public health guidance. If you have specific concerns about your health or your risk of infection, please contact your medical provider.

If you have questions, you can call DeKalb County Board of Health Epidemiology (404-508-7870) or DeKalb County Animal Enforcement Services (404-294-2996x2).



ANIMAL BITES AND RABIES FAQ



1. Which animals should I be the most concerned about?

Bites or scratches from wild carnivores, such as raccoons, skunks, and foxes, along with any bat exposures are considered high risk exposures. Unless the animal is available for testing, you will almost always need the PEP series.



2. Why are bat exposures considered high risk?

Bats have very tiny teeth, so a bite usually cannot be felt or seen on the skin. If there is an exposure, such as finding a bat in a room where you were sleeping, it is best to get the PEP series.



3. I got bitten or was exposed to a high risk animal. What should I do?

If the bite is severe, seek medical attention. If the animal is available for testing, call DeKalb County Animal Enforcement Services (404-294-2996x2) to pick it up. Test results will indicate whether you need to start the PEP series. If the animal is not available, start the PEP series as soon as possible.



4. I got bitten or scratched by a cat/dog/ferret. What should I do?

If the animal is a pet that someone else owns, obtain the owner's contact info if possible. If the animal is vaccinated against rabies or can be kept under observation for 10 days, you may not need to get the PEP series. Regardless of the pet's vaccination status, contact DeKalb County Animal Enforcement Services (404-294-2996x2) for instructions on how to monitor the animal for the next 10 days. If it is not possible to monitor the animal, please contact DeKalb County Board of Health Epidemiology Staff (404-508-7870) for guidance.



5. What is the purpose of the 10-day animal quarantine? Can't my pet just get tested for rabies?

Rabies testing is not possible on live animals. The purpose of the 10-day quarantine is to ensure that the animal is not showing any signs and symptoms of rabies. While vaccinated animals have a much lower risk of transmitting rabies, it is still important to monitor them. Vaccinated animals can be monitored at home. If the animal does not show any signs of a rabies infection during this time, the PEP series is not necessary for the human victim.



6. I got bitten by an animal and I'm not sure about my risk. What should I do?

Contact the DeKalb County Board of Health Epidemiology Staff (404-508-7870) to get a risk assessment for your specific exposure.