Rabies in the US Meeting Kit

In the United States, rabies is mostly found in wild animals like bats, raccoons, skunks, and foxes. However, in many other countries around the world, bites from dogs (including puppies) are the main source of rabies infections in people. Most people who die of rabies were bitten by a dog with rabies.

What is Rabies?

According to rabiesalliance.org, “Rabies is a viral disease that is transmitted through the saliva or tissues from the nervous system from an infected mammal to another mammal usually through a bite or scratch. Rabies is a zoonotic disease. Zoonotic diseases can pass between species. Bird flu and swine flu are other zoonotic diseases. The rabies virus attacks the central nervous system causing severely distressing neurological symptoms before causing the victim to die.” It is reported that once clinical symptoms appear, 99.9% victims die as a result of being infected. Humans and domestic animals can be infected from wildlife or other domestic animals that are carrying the disease.

THE RISK OF RABIES

You are at increased risk if you are a (an):

- animal control officer
- cave explorer
- person who works directly with wildlife, especially:
- bats
- foxes
- skunks
- raccoons
- animal shelter or animal rescue worker or volunteer.
- veterinarian, veterinary technologist, or other veterinary staff.
- laboratory researcher or technician who works with the rabies virus.
- hunter, trapper or taxidermist, especially in areas where

rabies is circulating.
- a traveler to countries and areas where rabies is transmitted more commonly by rabid dogs, and where there is limited access to adequate and safe rabies treatment (post-exposure prophylaxis)

WHO IS MOST AT RISK

Children are considered at higher risk of getting rabies because they:

- often play with animals
- are more likely to be bitten
- are less likely to report bites, scratches or licks

SYMPTOMS OF RABIES

Symptoms can appear as soon as a few days after being bitten by an infected animal. However, in most cases, symptoms may not appear until weeks or months later.

After the virus leaves the local bite area, it travels up a nearby nerve to the brain and can cause such symptoms as:

- Muscle spasms.
- Excessive movements.
- Agitation, aggressiveness.
- Bizarre or abnormal thoughts.
- Weakness, paralysis.
- Increased production of saliva or tears.
- Extreme sensitivity to bright lights, sounds, or touch.
- Difficulty speaking

BEST PRACTICES TO AVOID INFECTION

People at high risk of exposure to rabies should get the rabies vaccine before they come in contact with animals that might have rabies. Such people include veterinarians, animal handlers, and all rabies healthcare and scientific workers.

The pre-exposure vaccination schedule consists of 3 doses, given as follows:

- First dose given.
- Second dose given 7 days after first dose.
- Third dose given 21 days or 28 days after first dose.

If the decision is made to begin the rabies vaccine shots and you have never been vaccinated against rabies:

- You should get 5 doses of the rabies vaccine – first dose immediately, then additional doses 3, 7, 14, and 28 days after the first dose.
- You should also get a shot of Rabies Immune Globulin at the same time as the first dose of rabies vaccine.

If you have been previously vaccinated against rabies:

- You should get 2 doses of the rabies vaccine – the first dose immediately, and the second dose 3 days later.
- You do not need to get a shot of Rabies Immune Globulin.

What Are the Immediate Steps I Need to Take In Case Of an Animal Bite?

- Wash the bite area with soap and water for 5 to 10 minutes.
- Cover the bite area with a clean bandage.

FINAL WORD

While human cases of rabies in the U.S. is rare, plenty of animals still carry the disease. Rabies in humans is 100% preventable through prompt appropriate medical care. Yet, more than 55,000 people, mostly in Africa and Asia, die from rabies every year. Know the signs and symptoms of rabies so that you get the proper medical attention before symptoms set in and it is too late for a recovery.