

If someone you know has been bitten or scratched by an animal

Anyone who is bitten or scratched by a wild animal or a domestic animal they are not familiar with should immediately take precautions to prevent rabies.

Immediately wash the wound in warm soapy water, gently scrubbing the injured area for at least 10 minutes.

Get a description of the animal that bit or scratched the person. People should learn to identify the animals common in their area, such as raccoons, skunks, foxes, bats, opossum and others.

After the wound has been washed thoroughly, the person should immediately call their family doctor or a hospital emergency room. The bite should be reported to the local animal control official and board of health.

If the person was bitten by a wild animal that is still in the area, call the local animal control officer for assistance. If the animal was someone's pet, try to find out if the animal was vaccinated and who owned it.

For more information,

contact:

Your local board of health
Telephone number listed in phone book

**Massachusetts Department of
Public Health**
 **Division of Epidemiology**
(617) 983-6800

**Massachusetts Department of Food and
Agriculture, Bureau of Animal
Health**
 (617) 727-3020, Ext. 158

**Massachusetts Division of
Fisheries and Wildlife**
 (617) 727-3151
(508) 792-7270

**Massachusetts Society for
Prevention of Cruelty to Animals**
 (617) 522-7400

**Massachusetts Veterinary Medical Association,
Executive Office**
 (508) 839-6155



Protecting Yourself from **RABIES** in Massachusetts



Massachusetts Department of Public Health,
Division of Epidemiology and Immunizations

Facts About Rabies

Rabies is a disease of the nervous system caused by a virus usually transmitted by a bite, scratch or contact with an infected animal's saliva. When an animal or person is infected by the virus, the disease spreads through the nervous system to the brain. It will paralyze and kill the infected person or animal if not promptly treated.



Animals in the wild that most commonly carry the disease are raccoons, skunks, foxes and bats. These animals can transmit it to pets, including cats and dogs, and to humans. Other animals, such as birds, snakes, turtles and fish do not carry rabies.

Rabies has been recognized in bats in Massachusetts since the 1960s. The risk of rabies in Massachusetts is now greater than in the past because an outbreak carried by raccoons has become established in the Commonwealth. While the disease most strongly affects its host species (raccoons or bats, in Massachusetts), it can spill over into other species. Other wild animal species commonly affected are skunks, foxes, woodchucks, and coyotes. Unvaccinated domestic animals are also at risk of contracting rabies. For example, in 1993 and 1994 there were 31 rabid cats in Massachusetts. This makes it especially important for people to vaccinate their pets and educate their families about avoiding contact with wild and stray animals.

Things you can do to help control rabies

The best way to reduce your risk of rabies is to protect your pets and to decrease your contact with wild and stray animals. These goals can be met by following a few simple guidelines:



Have your dogs and cats vaccinated. Obey leash laws and report strays to the local dog officer.



Don't feed your pets outdoors—it could attract wild animals and strays. Never feed wild animals, especially near your home.



Teach your children to stay away from wild or stray animals, even if they seem tame. Avoid sick or strange-acting animals. Never try to keep wild animals as pets--it's against the law! Don't touch dead animals.

Reduce your home's appeal

Install a chimney cap to prevent raccoons and other animals from living inside your home.

Seal areas around your house that animals may use as a den. This includes under porches, crawl spaces beneath your house, your attic, and openings in sheds and other outbuildings. **Make sure animals have left before you seal up the space!**

Secure your garbage cans so they don't attract raccoons, skunks, and strays looking for food.

What to do if your pet has been bitten

Try to determine what type of animal bit your pet. Put on gloves and wash your animal's wounds with warm soapy water for at least 10 minutes. Contact your veterinarian immediately.

If the animal that bit your pet was a possible rabies carrier and your pet is up-to-date on its rabies vaccination, your pet will need to be confined for observation. If it exhibits signs of rabies, it will be humanely killed so its brain can be tested in a laboratory. If your pet is **unvaccinated**, it may have to be humanely killed or quarantined for six months.

Remember: the best way to prevent rabies is to have your pets vaccinated! That is why it is the law in Massachusetts that all dogs and cats must be vaccinated against rabies.

What if your pet has bitten someone?

Notify your local animal control official and your board of health.

Don't let it stray or give it away--it should be confined for 10 days for observation to make sure it is not ill with rabies.