

Vermont Rabies Control Overview

Rabies is a fatal viral disease found mainly in wildlife (especially raccoons, foxes, bats, skunks and woodchucks) but can infect domestic animals and humans. Hundreds of cases of animal rabies have been reported throughout Vermont since 1992 and the outbreak will continue to be a problem for many years.

No one can tell if an animal has rabies by looking at it. Rabid animals may seem normal or can be lethargic or aggressive. Usually there is a change in normal behavior. Any animal wounded by a wild animal not available for testing must be regarded as having been exposed to rabies. Rabies is mainly transmitted by a bite. Rare non-bite exposures can occur if wet infectious saliva or nervous tissue contacts a fresh open wound or the eyes, nose or mouth. Rabies virus is not found in blood, urine, feces or skunk spray.

Avoid wildlife, vaccinate domestic pets and livestock (check with your veterinarian every year) and know who in your community (town health officer or other local official or neighbor) will help you with an animal problem. If you think you have found orphaned wildlife, don't touch them, call the phone numbers on this page for help. Game wardens can be reached by calling the state police. If you are bitten by an animal, wash the wound immediately and call your doctor.

Bats are an important part of our ecosystem but should be appreciated at a distance. Bats are increasingly implicated in human rabies cases. A bat found in a room with a sleeping individual or an unattended child or a bat that has made physical contact with an individual should be tested for rabies.

A booster should be considered for a currently vaccinated domestic pet with wounds of unknown origin, whereas an unvaccinated domestic pet should be immediately vaccinated and kept under the owner's control and observation for 6 months (additional boosters at 3 and 8 weeks should be considered in high risk situations). Log rabies conversations with owners on the animal's record.

The local health officer shall cause an apparent healthy domestic animal that bites an individual, regardless of vaccination status, to be confined and observed for ten days for signs of illness, usually at a responsible owner's residence.

The Vermont Department of Health (VDH) is responsible for the prevention of rabies in humans and for the management of animals that may have exposed humans. The VDH assesses human and animal rabies exposure, coordinates rabies specimen testing and provides vaccination guidelines.

IMPORTANT

The VDH is responsible for deciding when domestic animals and wolf hybrids should be euthanized and tested and when these animals need to be quarantined for six months.

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1-800-640-4374, 802 863-7240, rjohnso@vdh.state.vt.us

The VT Rabies Hotline/USDA, Wildlife Services, 1-800-4-RABIES, 802-223-8690, offers excellent rabies and wildlife information by wildlife biologists. ###