



You've been bitten...now what?

BACKGROUND:

Rabies is in our community; it is a communicable disease we need to take seriously. In September of 2015, lab testing proved that a bat found in the City of Great Falls was positive for the rabies virus. From 2009-2015, there have been 7 confirmed cases of rabies in animals in Cascade County and 157 confirmed cases in Montana. Bats are the most common carrier of rabies in Cascade County. They are nocturnal creatures that can infect our domestic dogs and cats with rabies without leaving an apparent bite or scratch mark. Rabies is a virus that is passed from animals to humans and is almost always fatal to the human. The City-County Health Department (CCHD) investigates animal bites in an effort to prevent rabies from being transmitted to people. All animal bites must be reported to the local Health Officer immediately so CCHD can investigate.

Investigation Steps:

- **REPORT THE BITE:** The best way to report a bite to CCHD is to complete a Bite Report Form. You can download this from at www.cchdmt.org, click on the Environmental Health tab and go to Rabies Prevention. It is important to complete as much information as possible. Then fax the form to CCHD at (406) 761-9898. The form is also available from your Health Care Provider. Depending on the circumstances of the bite, local law enforcement may be asked to assist in the investigation.
- **LOCATE THE ANIMAL:** If the animal is a stray, local law enforcement will assist in attempting to locate that animal. If the animal is a pet, CCHD or local law enforcement will verify rabies vaccination status of the animal.
- **ISOLATION:** The animal will have to be quarantined for 10 days after the bite. The day of the bite is day zero.
- **VETERINARIAN ASSESSMENT:** On day 10, the animal will have to be assessed by a licensed Veterinarian for any clinical signs of rabies. If the animal wasn't vaccinated against rabies, it will have to be vaccinated that day.
- **VICTIM NOTIFICATION:** Once CCHD receives the information from the Veterinarian, you will be notified of the outcome. If the animal's health cannot be verified, CCHD will make a recommendation for the victim to receive post-exposure treatment.



Frequently Asked Questions:

Q: If my dog or cat is up-to-date on rabies vaccination, why do I have to quarantine the animal for 10 days?

A: Rabies is serious disease with a high fatality rate. The rabies vaccination is not a 100% guarantee that the animal is protected from the rabies virus. The quarantine is to protect other people and animals from another potential exposure.

Q: Why is the quarantine 10 days?

A: When a domestic dog or cat has rabies, 10 days is the longest period of time that the domestic dog or cat can shed the virus before clinical signs are evident.

Q: Will my domestic dog or cat be euthanized for a bite?

A: No. The purpose of CCHD investigating bites is to prevent rabies from being passed to a human. However, if the animal is rabid, that animal may be euthanized to prevent a very painful death, and to prevent the transmission of rabies to other animals or humans.

Q: My cat is indoor only, why does it need to be vaccinated?

A: The most recent rabid bat in Great Falls was found inside a home. Three unvaccinated cats in that home had to be euthanized due to the likely possibility the bat could have bitten one of them. Vaccination could have prevented the euthanasias.

Q: What is considered a potential exposure to the rabies virus?

A: Rabies is only transmitted when the virus is introduced into a bite wound, open cuts in the skin, or onto mucous membranes such as the eyes or mouth. Besides a bite, the contamination of open wounds, abrasions, mucous membranes, or scratches constitutes a non-bite exposure.

Q: What if I was bitten by a wild animal?

A: CCHD will still investigate the incident. Bites from a wild animal carry a higher risk for exposure to rabies. If the animal is not captured and tested, CCHD will recommend you receive post exposure treatment.

January 2016, Rabies prevention in accordance with Montana Codes Annotated (MCA) 50-2-120, 50-23-103 and the Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM) 37.114.571 and 32.3.1201, 32.3.1204. Some information obtained from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Montana Department of Livestock's websites.

For more information:
406-454-6950
www.cchdmt.org