

What is rabies?

Rabies is a **viral disease that attacks the brain and nervous system** of mammals, including humans. Once symptoms appear, rabies is almost always fatal. Rabies is **100% preventable** through prompt medical treatment after exposure.

What are the symptoms of rabies?

In people, early symptoms may look like the flu and can include:

- Fever, headache, or general weakness
- Anxiety, confusion, or irritability
- Tingling or pain at the site of the bite or scratch

As the disease progresses, symptoms may include:

- Difficulty swallowing, excessive drooling
- Hallucinations or agitation
- Paralysis

Once these symptoms begin, rabies is almost always fatal.

How is rabies transmitted?

Rabies is spread through the **saliva or brain/nervous tissue of infected animals**. Transmission usually occurs through:

- Bites
- Scratches that break skin
- Saliva entering open wounds, the eyes, nose, or mouth

Who is at risk?

Anyone who is bitten, scratched, or exposed to the saliva of a mammal that could have rabies is at risk. In Pennsylvania, rabies is most often found in:

- Bats
- Raccoons
- Skunks
- Foxes
- Cats and dogs (especially unvaccinated pets)

People with frequent contact with animals, such as veterinarians, wildlife handlers, or animal control officers, may be at higher risk.

What is the treatment?

If someone is exposed to rabies, they need **post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP)** as soon as possible.

- PEP is a series of shots (rabies vaccine plus, in some cases, rabies immune globulin).
- When given promptly after an exposure, PEP is **highly effective** at preventing rabies infection.
- Once symptoms develop, there is no effective treatment

How can rabies be prevented?

- **Vaccinate pets:** By law in Pennsylvania, all cats and dogs must be vaccinated against rabies.
- **Avoid wild animals:** Do not handle or feed wildlife. Teach children never to touch stray or wild animals.
- **Secure your home:** Keep bats out of living spaces by sealing openings and using screens.
- **Report exposures:** If you are bitten, scratched, or exposed to a potentially rabid animal, wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water, seek medical care, and report it to the Delaware County Health Department