

All About Rabies

What is Rabies?

Rabies is a virus (*Lyssavirus*) that infects cells in the central nervous system, causing disease in the brain and, ultimately, death. Any animal with rabies has the ability to transmit the disease to humans or other animals.

There is no cure for rabies, but it is 100 percent preventable through prompt, appropriate medical care.

How Does it Spread?

Rabies is transmitted when saliva or neural tissue of an infected animal is introduced into the body of a healthy person or animal. Exposure can occur through a bite, scratch or contact with infected saliva to open wounds or mucous membranes such as the eyes, nose or mouth.



Symptoms of Rabies in Animals:

- Fatigue
- Weakness
- Difficulty walking, breathing or swallowing
- Fever
- Not wanting to eat
- Abnormal behavior
- Vomiting
- Aggression

Animals with rabies often behave abnormally. However, it is impossible to tell by appearance if an animal has rabies. Abnormal behavior can include wild animals that appear friendly or tame, or nocturnal animals that are active during the day. Once clinical signs of rabies appear, the disease is almost always fatal.

How Can I Prevent Rabies?

► **Vaccinate your pets and livestock.** By S.C. law, all dogs, cats and ferrets should be vaccinated at a frequency that provides continuous protection. In addition, the USDA has approved rabies vaccines for cows, horses and sheep.

Keeping your animals up-to-date on their rabies vaccination is one of the easiest and most effective ways you can protect yourself, your family and your pets from this fatal disease.

- **Do not allow your pets to roam freely.** Keep your pets safely confined to your property.
- **Avoid animals behaving abnormally.** Always play it safe and give animals their space, particularly wild and stray animals.
- **Wild animals are not pets.** If you see an animal in need, contact a licensed wildlife rehabilitator in your area. Do not approach the animal.

If Exposure Occurs:

1. Immediately wash any wounds with soap and water.
2. Contact your health care provider, even for minor incidents.
3. Report the incident to your local DHEC Environmental Health Services office for proper follow up.