

---

## Rabies: A Preventable Disease

**R**abies is a serious disease that affects the central nervous system. Each year about 40,000 people in the United States receive a series of post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) shots after being bitten by an animal suspected of carrying rabies. Caused by a virus and transmitted through saliva, rabies causes inflammation of the brain and spinal cord. If left untreated, it is fatal.

Worldwide about 55,000 deaths occur from rabies annually, mainly among children under fifteen. Fortunately, rabies deaths in the United States are extremely rare as the PEP treatment is effective and widely available. Any mammal can carry rabies. In Colorado the primary sources of infection are from bats and skunks. Domestic animals such as dogs, cats, cattle, etc. can also become infected from wild animal bites and then pass the virus on to humans. Although rare, rabies can be transmitted from infected saliva getting into a person's eyes, nose, mouth, or an open wound.

### Rabies Signs

While an infected or rabid animal will usually demonstrate abnormal behavior, you cannot tell if an animal is infected by looking at it. In movies or on TV animals with rabies are depicted as foaming at the mouth. In reality, rabies makes animals produce extra saliva which may cause them to drool. Aggression, lack of fear of people, or confusion are possible behavior indicators of rabies infection; however, these visual cues should not be counted on. The best way to avoid rabies is to avoid contact with wild or unknown animals.

### Rabies Symptoms

It may take one to three months for rabies symptoms to develop in people. Once symptoms appear the disease is often fatal, which is why prompt treatment for animal bites is crucial. Early rabies symptoms include: fever, headache, sore throat, and feeling tired. If the disease develops untreated, symptoms include: pain and tingling at bite location, hallucinations, tightening of the throat muscles leading to a fear of water, and paralysis.

### Animal Bites or Scratches

If bitten or scratched, wash the wound thoroughly with soap and running water. Contact your health care provider and local public health department immediately. Find your local public health department here: <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/find-your-local-public-health-agency>. You may also report any animals acting strangely to your local public health department.

### What This Means for Counties

County employees should do their best to avoid coming into close contact with wild or unknown animals. Rabid animals cannot be identified by sight and bites or scratches should be reported to medical and public health personnel. For more information, contact CTSI at 303 861 0507. [ctsi](#)