

# Rabies



Photo: Dave Menke/US Fish & Wildlife Service

**CAUSE:** Rabies is caused by a virus that affects the central nervous system.

**EFFECT:** Since rabies affects the brain, the most common signs are behavioral changes or paralysis. Animals can show nervousness, aggression, inability to walk, and excessive salivation. Nocturnal animals will be seen wandering about during the day. Cows will abruptly stop making milk.

**How is Rabies spread?** Rabies is spread by contact with the saliva or blood of infected animals, most commonly by bites. Raccoons, foxes, skunks, and bats may carry rabies. Wild animals, other than bats, usually only pose an indirect threat to human health.

**How can Rabies be prevented?** Vaccinate all pets and domestic livestock over 3 months of age in areas where rabies is endemic in wildlife. This includes all of Vermont. Rabies was reported in a donkey, a horse, and a cow in Vermont in 2002. Use caution if an animal exhibits unusual behavior.



**Can Rabies affect people?** Yes, rabies can be fatal to humans when an exposure is not recognized and post-exposure vaccination is not obtained.

**What if there is an outbreak?** Usually only sporadic cases occur, even in unvaccinated populations. If rabies is suspected, call your veterinarian. If human exposure has occurred, call your public health department to determine whether a post-exposure inoculation series is needed. Tissue from the back of the brain must be submitted to confirm whether an animal died of rabies.

**For more information on Rabies, see:**

[CDC Fact Sheet: Rabies](#)

[CDC: Rabies Home Page](#)

[The Merck Veterinary Manual: Rabies](#)

[Rabies in Vermont](#)