

# RABIES VIRUS

## About the Rabies Epidemic

All warm blooded animals, including cats, dogs, wildlife, & humans, can become infected by the Rabies virus, and once infected, there is no cure. The lethality of Rabies makes it a very important disease to control through timely vaccination of all pets. The rabies virus is spread through animal bites and contact with saliva of infected animals. Massachusetts State law mandates that all wounds of unknown origin be considered suspect for rabies, and be treated appropriately. The disease develops slowly and clinical signs can begin to show anywhere from ten days to several months after infection. Rabies is a lethal virus that attacks the nerve tissue. Clinical signs of rabies occurs in two stages, the first being **"furious"** rabies, where animals roam, snap, hypersalivate, and become unnaturally aggressive, followed by **"dumb"** rabies, where the victim avoids contact with other animals and humans, loses local muscle function causing excessive drooling, and lower jaw paralysis. Death is eventually due to paralysis of the diaphragm, the muscle used for breathing. In North America, a rabies outbreak is currently occurring in the raccoon, skunk, fox, and bat wildlife populations, and there have been a small number of documented cases of rabies in dogs, cats, horses, and cows.

## Symptoms- furious stage

- Unnatural aggression
- Roaming behavior
- Snapping, biting
- Hypersalivation (foaming at the mouth)

## Symptoms- dumb stage

- Local muscle incoordination
- Convulsions
- Excessive drooling
- Losses ability to swallow
- Death- due to paralysis of diaphragm & respiratory arrest

## Diagnosis

The only way to confirm a diagnosis of rabies is to examine brain tissue under the microscope. Animals should be highly suspect if it has bite wounds or wounds of unknown origin, and are currently showing abnormal neurologic behavior. If the animal has bitten a human, many states require that the animal be euthanized and the brain tested.

## Treatment- there is no treatment for rabies

An infected animal usually dies within ten days of first showing clinical signs, however it may take up to six months for the virus to reach the brain after initial infection. All

animals that are currently up to date on their rabies vaccine should get an immediate rabies booster. Wounds should be thoroughly cleaned. Humans are advised to cleanse their hands thoroughly after handling an animal with a possible exposure to rabies.

**Rabies control is based on PREVENTION, with vaccination, and prompt attention after a possible exposure.**

### **Prognosis**

Prognosis is grave. All animals with rabies die within 10 days of showing neurologic signs.