

How do I know if an animal was contagious with rabies when it bit or scratched me?

The Halton Region Health Department follows specific procedures to determine whether or not an animal was contagious with rabies when a bite or scratch occurred:

- Dogs, cats and ferrets are confined for a 10-day isolation period at a location approved by the Health Department (usually the owner's home). During the isolation period the animal is observed for signs of rabies. If the animal was contagious at the time of the incident, it will display signs of rabies within the 10-day period.
- If the animal involved cannot be located and observed, the person exposed may require rabies treatment.



Protect your family and pets against rabies

- Keep your pet's vaccination up to date. Vaccinations are effective for either one or three years, depending on the vaccine used by your veterinarian. In Ontario, vaccination of all cats and dogs three months of age and older is required by law. There is a fine for non-compliance.
- Keep your pet on a leash when off your property.
- DO NOT handle or come into contact with wild or unfamiliar animals and teach your children to do so as well.
- Do not attempt to relocate any wild animals.
- Use a shovel and protective gloves if you need to dispose of a dead animal.
- Report any sick or dying animal to an animal control agency but do not touch the animal.
- Report all animal exposures to the Health Department.



For more information, visit halton.ca/rabies or dial 311.



Rabies



HE-16122



halton.ca 311



What is rabies?

Rabies is a deadly disease that affects the central nervous system of warm blooded animals, including humans. Rabies spreads through exposure to saliva from infected animals – bites, scratches, licks on broken skin and mucous membranes such as the eyes or mouth. The rabies virus enters damaged nerves through a bite or an open wound and travels towards the brain.

Although all mammals can get rabies, in Ontario, bats, racoons, skunks and foxes are the most common carriers of rabies. Domestic and farm animals such as dogs, cats and cattle can also get rabies.

Small rodents (such as hamsters, squirrels, rats and mice) and rabbits are rarely found to be infected with rabies and have not been known to cause human rabies in Canada.

What should I do if I am bitten or scratched by an animal?

- Wash the wound (or mucous membranes) immediately and thoroughly with soap and water and remove any clothing that could be contaminated by saliva.
- Contact your family doctor.
- Report the incident immediately to the Halton Region Health Department and provide as much information as possible related to the incident, including:
 - the name, address and phone number of the pet owner;
 - a description of the animal; and
 - any other information that will help in locating the animal.
- Notify animal control services if your injury is caused by a stray animal or is the result of a vicious animal attack. Also notify them of any stray, distressed, injured or trapped animals.

What are the symptoms of rabies in animals?

Animals may show a variety of different signs and symptoms if they are infected with the rabies virus. Symptoms can develop from two weeks to many months after infection, and may include:

- wild animals acting friendly or tame;
- animals hiding in isolated areas and appearing depressed;
- loss of fear of humans, especially skunks (e.g., they do not run away when approached by humans or domestic animals);
- paralysis, such as abnormal facial expressions, drooping head, sagging jaws or paralyzed hind legs;
- extreme excitement and aggression;
- gnawing and biting their own legs;
- attacking objects or other animals; or
- frothing at the mouth.

Raccoon rabies

There are several different strains (types) of rabies, including raccoon, fox and bat strains. In late 2015, several cases of raccoons with raccoon strain rabies were found in the Hamilton area. These are the first cases of raccoon strain rabies since 2005. As a result of these cases, the Ontario Government initiated additional oral rabies vaccine baiting targeting foxes, raccoons and skunks.



What are the symptoms of rabies in humans?

Symptoms usually develop three to eight weeks after exposure. The length of time depends on a number of factors including:

- the severity of the bite;
- location of bite; and
- the amount and strain of the rabies virus.

Initial symptoms are usually flu-like with fever, headache and nausea.

As the disease progresses, symptoms may include:

- insomnia
- anxiety
- slight or partial paralysis
- increased activity, restlessness
- hallucinations
- difficulty swallowing
- a fear of water

Death can occur within days of the onset of symptoms, usually as a result of respiratory failure.

Is there a treatment for rabies available?

Rabies can be prevented in humans as long as treatment is sought before the symptoms occur. People who may have been exposed to the rabies virus can get a series of vaccine injections over a one month period in order to prevent the development of symptoms. However, once rabies symptoms are present, the outcome of the disease is almost always fatal.