

# RABIES

## Fight the bite!



### What is rabies?

Rabies is a fatal disease caused by a virus that affects warm blooded animals, including humans. Once symptoms appear, rabies is almost always fatal.

In Ontario, the most common animals that carry the rabies virus are bats, raccoons, skunks and foxes. Animals such as cats, dogs and cattle can also get rabies if they are exposed to an animal infected with rabies.

### How is rabies spread?

The rabies virus is spread by contact with saliva from an infected animal, generally from a bite, lick or scratch. It can also spread if the saliva touches a person's mouth, nose or eyes, or through an open cut or wound. Careless handling of a dead rabid animal can also spread the disease.

### What should I do if I have been bitten or scratched by an animal?

Wash the wound with soap and warm water, and seek immediate medical attention.

Report the incident to York Region Public Health as soon as possible, call Health Connection 1-800-361-5653 or TTY 1-866-512-6228 and speak to a Public Health Inspector.

### PUBLIC HEALTH

1-800-361-5653

TTY: 1-866-512-6228

[york.ca/rabies](http://york.ca/rabies)

19-5511

### What are the symptoms of rabies in animals?

Animals with rabies may show different signs and symptoms and not necessarily behave the same.

- Some animals may become easily frightened, unusually tame or violent and aggressive without reason
- Rabid animals may show signs of partial paralysis of the hind limbs, foaming of the mouth or no symptoms at all

If your pet has any of these symptoms or is behaving strangely, contact your veterinarian immediately.

### Exposure to bats

People are at risk for exposure to rabies when:

- A bat bites or scratches a person
- Saliva from a live bat enters a person's, mouth, nose, eyes or wound
- A bat touches or lands on a person

If you come into direct contact with a live bat, confine the bat in a room by closing all doors and windows. If the bat is dead, place a box or container over the bat to keep your children and pets away from it and contact York Region Public Health.

## How to “bat proof” your home

Some bats live in buildings, and there may be no reason to evict them if there is a little chance of contact with people. However, bats should always be prevented from entering the rooms of your home.

It is best to contact a professional pest control or wildlife removal company to remove bats from your home. If you choose to “bat-proof” your home yourself, here are some suggestions.

### Inspect your home for possible entry points

- Entry points are often near the edge of the roof, under the eaves or loose boards, openings in the roof or vents, or cracks around the chimney. Bats can also squeeze through very tiny spaces, as small as six millimetres

### Bat-proof your home

- Use window screens, chimney caps and draft guards beneath doors, fill electrical and plumbing holes with stainless steel wool or caulking and ensure all exterior doors close tightly
- Evict bats by observing where the bat exits the building at dusk and then hang clear plastic sheeting or bird netting over these areas; this will help prevent bats from re-entering. After the bats have left, the opening can be permanently sealed

### Pick the right time of year

- The best time to remove bats from your home is in the spring or fall. Avoid removing bats between May and August as this may trap young bats

### Treatment for humans

There is no cure for rabies once symptoms develop, so taking the proper precautions to avoid getting bitten is extremely important. There are a series of vaccines available for people who may have been exposed to the rabies virus. The vaccine is designed to prevent the development of symptoms, or death, caused by the rabies virus.

If treatment is required, rabies vaccines, called rabies post-exposure prophylaxis, are given and consist of a series of injections over a two week period.

For more information on rabies prevention, education and control call Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653, TTY: 1-866-512-6228 or visit [york.ca](http://york.ca)

## How can I protect myself and my family?

There are many ways to protect yourself and your family from rabies.

- If you are an animal owner, keep your pet’s vaccinations up-to-date. Under Ontario law, dogs and cats three months of age and older are legally required to be annually immunized against rabies
- Report all animal bites or scratches to York Region Public Health
- Teach your children to stay away from unfamiliar animals and to immediately tell an adult if they have been bitten or scratched
- Avoid feeding, handling or coming into contact with wild or unfamiliar animals
- Protect your pet from coming into contact with wild animals by keeping them on a leash when they are off your property
- Never touch a dead animal with your bare hands. If you must dispose of a dead animal, wear thick protective gloves and use a shovel
- Do not try to assist a sick or dying animal; call your local animal control agency to report a sick animal
- Take measures to keep wild animals away from your home and property
- If you are travelling abroad, avoid contact with wild animals and be especially careful around cats and dogs in developing countries

## COMMON BAT ENTRY POINTS

