

A Message to Parents on Rabies

What is rabies?

- Rabies is a viral infection that affects the central nervous systems of humans and other mammals.
- Rabies can be spread from wild animals to domestic pets including cats, dogs and ferrets through bites and scratches. Humans are at risk when bitten or scratched by wild animals or infected domestic pets. In Ontario, the rabies virus is mainly found in and spread by: bats, skunks, foxes, raccoons, and coyotes.
- Symptoms usually begin with fever, cough, sore throat, headache and general weakness or discomfort. As the disease progresses, more specific symptoms appear and may include: insomnia, anxiety, confusion, slight or partial paralysis, excitation, hallucinations, agitation, hyper-salivation (increase in saliva), difficulty swallowing, and hydrophobia (fear of water or unable to drink).
- Rabies is a viral infection that will be fatal if the vaccine is not given before symptoms appear.
- In Hamilton, from January 2015 to May 2016 there were 4 reports of bats with rabies, 65 raccoons positive for rabies and 42 skunks positive for rabies.

Can you tell if an animal has rabies?

- You can't tell if an animal has rabies by just looking at it. A clue though is if the animal is acting strangely, for example wild animals getting too close to humans. If you come across a wild animal like a bat, skunk or raccoon, do **not** approach or touch the animal; in case it has rabies.
- Some animals may act mad when they have rabies. They will be hostile and may try to bite you or other animals. In movies, animals with rabies look like they are foaming at the mouth. What's really happening is that the rabies makes them have more saliva and that makes them drool.
- Other animals may act timid or shy when they have rabies. This is the most common kind. A wild animal might move slowly or act tame. You might be able to easily get close to it. Since that's not the way wild animals usually act, you should remember that something could be wrong.

How do you get rabies?

- The only way dogs, cats, raccoons, bats, and other animals can give **you** rabies is if you are bitten or scratched by one that has rabies, or if you have been in direct contact with the saliva of an infected animal.

Where is rabies found?

- Rabies is a serious disease and it is found across the world, even in Hamilton. This year, over 55,000 people around the world will die from rabies. That's one person every 10 minutes. Half of the people who die from rabies are under the age of 15.
- In 2016, rabies surveillance has shown that rabies is established in the Hamilton area.

A Message to Parents on Rabies (Continued)

What to do if an animal bites or scratches you?

- If you are bitten or scratched, have someone help you wash out the wound for five minutes with soap and water and then take you right away to the doctor. If there's a chance the animal has rabies, your doctor will want to give you the rabies vaccine to make sure you don't get rabies, too. Try to get the animal owner information, if possible.
- Your doctor will contact Hamilton Public Health Services at (905) 546-3570 and report the bite. Hamilton Public Health Services will investigate, try to confine the dog or cat or have the animal sent for testing. If the risk of rabies is high, Public Health Services will give your doctor the rabies vaccine.

How to prevent rabies?

- Vaccinate your dogs, cats and ferrets against rabies and keep the vaccines up to date.
- Keep your pets away from wild or stray animals
- Supervise your pets while outside.
- Don't handle, pet or feed wild or stray animals and if you see one acting strangely, call (905) 546-2489.
- Do not transport or relocate wild animals.
- Have your pets spayed or neutered so they'll be more likely to stay home
- If you find a bat in your home, try to confine it to a room, shut the door and call (905) 546-2489
- Wash all animal bites or scratches with warm soapy water, and
- Report all animal bites or scratches to Hamilton Public Health Services by calling (905) 546-2489.

Additional Resources

World Rabies Day

www.worldrabiesday.org

Center for Disease Prevention and Control Rabies Resources for Children

www.cdc.gov/rabiesandkids



Hamilton
Public Health Services



For more information contact: Hamilton Public Health Services

Phone: (905) 546-2489

www.hamilton.ca/rabies

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), <http://www.cdc.gov/rabiesandkids/>
Retrieved on April 4, 2011.