SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY | Public Health

What You Need to Know About RABIES

Rabies is a deadly disease caused by a virus that attacks the central nervous system. The virus lives in the saliva and brain tissue of infected animals.

Rabies is carried mainly by wild animals such as raccoons, skunks, bats, coyotes, and foxes. However, stray dogs and cats can easily pick up rabies from wild or stray animals. Rabies only infects mammals, which means that pets, livestock, wildlife and people are at risk.

Rabies is spread mainly through bites from infected animals, but the disease can be spread in other ways too. For example, rabies can be passed by scratches from an infected animal or when infected saliva or brain tissue comes into contact with: open wounds, skin breaks or mucous membranes like the thin layers of tissue that line the eyes, nose and mouth.

Signs of Rabies in Animals

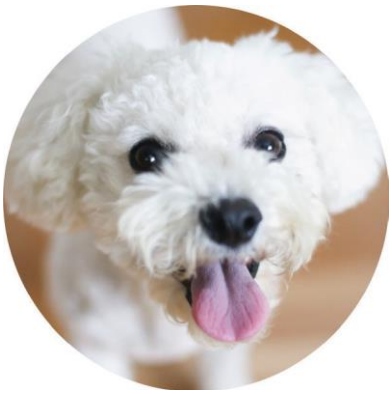
Once the rabies virus enters the body, it travels along the nerves to the brain. Animals with rabies may show a variety of signs, including:

- Fearfulness
- Aggression
- Excessive drooling
- Difficulty swallowing
- Staggering
- Paralysis
- Seizures
- Aggressive behavior but may also be uncharacteristically affectionate or approachable

Horses and livestock with rabies also may exhibit depression, self-mutilation, or increased sensitivity to light.

Rabid wild animals may lose their natural fear of humans and display unusual behavior; for example, an animal that is usually only seen at night may be seen wandering in the daytime.

Preventing Rabies



In Pets

- Vaccinate pets against rabies. Dogs are required to be vaccinated for rabies at four months of age. Cats can be vaccinated as early as twelve to sixteen weeks old. The first rabies vaccine is effective for one year. After that initial shot, pets should be revaccinated every three years.
- Get pets spayed or neutered.
- Do not let pets roam free.

In People

- Do not touch, feed, harass or provide shelter for any unfamiliar pets, wild or stray animals.
- Keep trash cans tightly covered and avoid storing any food outside.
- Seal small openings and keep unscreened doors and windows closed.
- Teach children never to approach unfamiliar animals and to tell an adult immediately if they are bitten or scratched by any animal.
- Wash animal bites or scratches immediately with soap and water.
- Seek immediate medical attention if you are bitten by an animal.
- Report any bite or scratch from a domestic or wild animal to the animal control agency for the area where the bite/scratch occurred.
- Report dead bats immediately to the animal control agency the animal is located in.

San Bernardino County Animal Care and Control

San Bernardino County Animal Care and Control (ACC) provides services in all the unincorporated areas of the county, except for the West End unincorporated communities, as well as the cities of Big Bear Lake, Highland and Yucaipa. Residents that live outside of ACC's service areas can check the list of other animal control agencies that provide services in the county at https://wp.sbcounty.gov/dph/programs/acc/shelters/other-shelters.