



NORTHPARK Animal Hospital

RABIES

What is Rabies?

Rabies is transmitted by a virus and is one of the most devastating diseases affecting mammals, including dogs and humans.

How is rabies transmitted?

The disease is usually transmitted by the bite of an infected animal. It is a disease of antiquity; the danger from the bite of a mad dog was known as long ago as the 23rd century BC.



How widespread is Rabies?

Rabies occurs in every continent except Australia and Antarctica. Most countries are affected with the exception of Great Britain, Ireland, Japan, Norway, Sweden and the Iberian Peninsula.

How is the virus transmitted?

Rabies virus does not survive long outside the body. The infection is transmitted when one infected animal bites another. In Europe, foxes are the main reservoir while in North America the skunk, raccoon and bat are important transmission routes. In Asia, Africa and Latin America the main reservoir is not wildlife but stray dogs. In these areas, human infection and fatalities are more common.

How long is the incubation period?

The incubation period can vary from two weeks to four months or even more. The speed at which clinical signs develop depends upon:

- The site of infection - the nearer the bite is to the brain and spinal cord, the quicker the virus reaches the nervous tissue
- The severity of the bite
- The amount of virus injected by the bite

What are the clinical signs?

Following a bite from a rabid animal, the disease progresses in stages. In the first or prodromal phase the dog undergoes a marked change in temperament. Quiet dogs become agitated and active pets become nervous or shy.

There are two recognized forms of the clinical disease:

1. **Furious rabies** occurs when the rabid dog becomes highly excitable and displays evidence of a depraved appetite, eating and chewing stones, earth and rubbish (pica). Paralysis eventually sets in and the rabid animal may be unable to eat and drink. Hydrophobia (fear of water) is not a sign of rabies in dogs. This is a feature of human rabies. The dog finally dies in a violent seizure.
2. **Dumb rabies** is the common form. There is progressive paralysis involving the limbs, distortion of the face and a similar difficulty in swallowing. Owners will frequently think the dog has something stuck in the mouth or throat. **Care should be taken in examination since rabies may be transmitted by saliva.** Ultimately the dog becomes comatose and dies.

Is it possible to survive a bite from a rabid animal?



There are isolated reports of both dogs and people surviving. Without vaccination and rapid post-exposure treatment, the chances of survival are poor.

Is vaccination effective?

Vaccination promotes the production of antibodies but is only effective if given before the virus enters the nervous system. Modern rabies vaccines for dogs, cats, horses and ferrets are extremely safe and effective.

What is the treatment?

There is no treatment for a dog with rabies. If rabies is suspected, the dog has to be kept in isolation and prevented from escaping or injuring someone and the local and state/provincial animal control offices notified. If the dog has not died it will then be put to sleep and a post mortem carried out.

Can I catch rabies?

Yes, the disease is *zoonotic* or can be transmitted to man. It is only transmitted by the bite of a rabid animal. The virus is present in the saliva of the infected animal only for a limited time.

If any animal that may be suspicious for rabies bites you, immediately wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water, then seek immediate medical assistance.

Post exposure rabies treatment with serum or vaccine may be recommended and is very successful if begun quickly.

Is it possible to vaccinate my dog?

There are several United States Food and Drug Administration (USDA) rabies vaccines approved for dogs, cats, horses and ferrets. Dogs and cats at the age of 12 weeks should be vaccinated. Rabies revaccination is dependent on state/provincial law. We will assist you in obtaining rabies vaccination and any necessary licenses for your pet.