

What is rabies?

Rabies is a viral disease affecting the central nervous system. It is transmitted from infected mammals to humans and is invariably fatal once symptoms appear. Fortunately, human rabies is rare in the United States. All mammals, including humans, are susceptible to rabies.

How is rabies spread?

Rabies is almost always contracted by exposure to a rabid animal. The exposure is usually through a bite, but scratches and saliva contact with broken skin are also possible routes.

What are the symptoms of rabies?

Early symptoms include apprehension, irritability, headache, fever and sometimes itching or pain at the exposure site. The disease progresses to paralysis, throat muscles spasm, convulsions, delirium and death. Once symptoms appear, rabies cannot be successfully treated.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

The time between exposure and the onset of symptoms is variable, but is normally 31-90 days in humans. Incubation periods as short as 9 days and over one year have been reported.

Is a human able to spread rabies?

Person to person transmission is extremely rare; however, precautions should be taken to prevent exposure to the saliva of a diseased person. Tissues from diseased individuals must not be used in transplant procedures.

What is the treatment for exposure to rabies?

The most effective rabies prevention is immediate thorough cleansing of animal bite or scratch wounds with liberal amounts of soap and water. If circumstances of the exposure warrant, this is followed by the administration by injection of rabies immune globulin (dosage dependent on weight) and five doses of human rabies vaccine administered in the arm on days 0, 3, 7, 14 and 28 after exposure.

What happens if rabies exposure goes untreated?

Exposure of a human to a rabid animal does not always result in rabies. If preventive treatment is obtained promptly following a rabies exposure, most cases of rabies will be prevented. Untreated cases will invariably result in death. All animal bites, regardless of whether the animal is available for rabies testing, should be evaluated by a health professional to determine if treatment is necessary.

What can be done to prevent the spread of rabies?

Exposure to rabies may be minimized by eliminating all stray dogs and cats; having pet dogs, cats, and ferrets vaccinated; and staying away from all wild animals, especially those acting abnormally. Educate children to avoid stray, wild, sick, or injured animals. Feed pets in the house or bring pet food into the house when your pets are finished eating. Avoid keeping exotic or wild animals as pets.