



## Rabies



### **What is Rabies?**

Rabies is caused by a virus and is one of the oldest recognized wildlife diseases.

### **Where is it found?**

Rabies is found worldwide and can cause disease in many species under experimental conditions, but only mammals are important in the epidemiology of the disease.

### **How is it spread?**

Rabies is normally spread through the bite of an infected animal. Other potential routes of infection are possible and can include scratches, abrasions, or open wounds that are exposed to saliva or other potentially infectious material from a rabid animal. In Wyoming humans and their pets are most at risk of contracting rabies from bats and skunks.

### **What are some clinical signs of disease?**

Rabies is a neurological disease and symptoms can present in a number of ways. Not all cases of rabies present as aggression. Common signs can include aggression, excessive salivation, incoordination, acting "tame" or having a lack of fear, self-mutilation, lethargy, mild paralysis and seizures.

### **How does this disease affect me?**

Rabies is a serious human health concern due to the near 100% fatality rate once clinical signs develop. Agency personnel who routinely work with species of concern (canids, felids, mustelids) should have pre-exposure vaccination. Pre-exposure vaccination does not eliminate the need for additional medical attention if rabies exposure occurs, but it does reduce post exposure treatments. Pre-exposure vaccination may also provide some degree of protection when exposure is inapparent or unrecognized or when post exposure treatment may be delayed.

### **Information for outdoor recreationists:**

Rabies generally has population effects on species that might be of minor interest (i.e., skunks, raccoons) to management agencies. However, enzootic rabies in these minor species may spill over into species of value or concern. If you think you have been exposed to rabies contact your health care provider immediately. Always talk to your veterinarian if your pet comes into contact with a wild animal that is suspected to have rabies. Testing animals for rabies requires an intact brain. Animals shot in the head or that have severe blunt force head trauma may not be suitable for testing.

For additional information on rabies or any other wildlife disease, please contact the WGFD Wildlife Health Laboratory at 307-745-5865.