



To: Students and their Parents  
From: Dutchess County Department of Health  
387 Main St., Poughkeepsie, NY 12601

**What is Rabies?** Rabies is a viral infection that affects the nervous system of mammals. It is present in the saliva, nervous tissue, and contaminated blood of a rabid animal. It is most efficiently transmitted by the bite of an infected animal, but any direct contact with the saliva, nervous tissue, or contaminated blood of an infected animal by a human or other animal with an open wound, broken skin, or mucous membrane of the eyes or nose constitutes a potential for exposure to the virus.

**Can you avoid exposure and prevent rabies?**

Yes, by: (1) avoiding contact with wild animals (i. e., raccoons, foxes, skunks, woodchucks, and bats) reduces the risk; (2) not approaching or handling domestic animals especially stray cats, you do not know; (3) not attempting to handle or capture sick or "orphaned" wildlife; (4) keeping animals away from your home - all garbage should be stored in animal resistant containers; (5) keeping doors and windows to homes or garages closed or screened; (6) vaccinating all dogs and cats - it is also recommended that horses, cattle, goats, and sheep be vaccinated; get your pet vaccinated at a private veterinarian's office or a municipal sponsored rabies clinic; (7) be aware of any unusual signs or symptoms such as wild animals that appear overly friendly, drunk, irritable, nervous, excitable, and/or have excessive salivation. NOTE: Wild animals that are usually out at night, when they are infected, they may be seen during the day.

**Why does my pet need to be confined and observed if it bites someone?** If a dog or cat bites a person, the animal must be observed for 10 days to see if symptoms of rabies develop. This is necessary even if it has been vaccinated. Unvaccinated animals must be confined in a

**When do animal bites need medical attention?**

If you or your child is bitten or scratched by an animal, the following steps should be taken: (1) learn as much as you can about the domestic animal. If the animal is with an owner, get their name and address. If it is a wild or stray animal, look to see if there are any features that will allow you to identify it later on and call your local animal control or police. In the case of a bat contact, if possible to do so without endangering yourself, capture the animal in a container and call the Department of Health as the animal can be tested for rabies; (2) wash the wound carefully with plenty of soap and water; (3) contact the Department of Health, your physician, or local emergency room for advice as to whether rabies post-exposure treatment is necessary. In addition, your health care provider should check to see whether you need additional first aid treatment and whether the wound was properly cleaned.

**Is there a treatment for rabies?** There is no known cure for rabies once symptoms develop, but rabies can be prevented if rabies immunoglobulin and vaccine are given after exposure to the virus.

**When should I report a rabies incident to the Dutchess County Health Department?**

Immediately report: (1) any bite or contact of a human with a wild animal, stray dog, or cat; (2) any bite or scratch of a human with a domestic pet; (3) any human contact with a domestic pet which has been in direct conflict with a wild animal; (4) any direct contact between a domestic pet or livestock and a potentially rabid animal; or (5) a bat observed in a room with a sleeping person.

