



Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department

Press Release

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For Immediate Release

Protect Your Family From Rabies

Parkersburg, WV, May 22, 2019 – Rabies is a preventable viral disease of mammals most often transmitted through the bite of a rabid animal. The vast majority of rabies cases reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) each year occur in wild animals like raccoons, skunks, bats, and foxes.

Transmission of rabies virus usually begins when infected saliva of a rabid animal is passed to an uninfected animal or human through a bite. In rare cases, transmission of the virus can occur if the saliva comes in contact with mucous membranes such as the eyes, nose or mouth or an open cut or wound.

The rabies virus infects the central nervous system and unless it is treated very early it will infect the brain and cause death. Early symptoms of rabies in people are similar to many other illnesses: fever, headache, general discomfort. As the disease progresses, more specific symptoms occur and can include insomnia, anxiety, confusion, hallucinations, difficulty swallowing and hydrophobia (fear of water). Death occurs within days of the onset of these symptoms.

Rabies in humans is 100 percent preventable through vaccinating pets and seeking prompt medical attention if bitten. It is important to regularly take cats, ferrets, and dogs to the veterinarian to keep them updated on the rabies vaccine. Maintain control of your pets by keeping cats and ferrets indoors and keeping dogs under direct supervision.

Suspected bites should be taken seriously and medical treatment should be sought. It's important to remember that rabies is a medical urgency but not an emergency. Decisions should not be delayed. Wash any wounds immediately. One of the most effective ways to decrease the chance for infection is to wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water.

Your doctor will decide if you need a rabies vaccination. Decisions to start vaccination, known as postexposure prophylaxis (PEP), will be based on your type of exposure and the animal you were

exposed to, as well as laboratory and surveillance information for the geographic area where the exposure occurred.

In the United States, postexposure prophylaxis consists of a regimen of one dose of immune globulin and four doses of rabies vaccine over a 14-day period. Rabies immune globulin and the first dose of rabies vaccine should be given by your health care provider as soon as possible after exposure. Additional doses of rabies vaccine should be given on days 3, 7, and 14 after the first vaccination. Current vaccines are relatively painless and are given in your arm, like a flu or tetanus vaccine.

Also bites to a human from any animal should be reported to the Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department for investigation. If a bat is found, it should be reported even if there is no visible bite marks. Their teeth are so small, a bite may not be detected.

To learn more about rabies visit cdc.gov/rabies.

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