

## Rabies Information

June, 2016

A topic that comes up frequently with people contacting our department is that of rabies. Because of people's exposure to animals through bites or handling there are always concerns about the transmission of this particular disease. An excellent web site has been developed by Iowa Public Health at <http://www.idph.iowa.gov/rabies>. You will find much information there.

Rabies is caused by a virus that attacks the central nervous system. The disease would be considered fatal 100% of the time for people who don't get the vaccination when exposed to the disease. Because antibiotics do not affect viruses, and there are few viral medicines, there is no real way to fight the disease once it sets in. (There has been ONE case of a girl that did survive rabies through extraordinary efforts but when this same treatment regimen has been tried on cases since then, all have died.)

This little web page is not designed to provide any kind of medical advice. Different doctors would handle different exposures in different ways and a person should always consult with the doctor and follow that advice. But let's just make a few points.

Rabies is normally transferred to humans through bites from rabid animals. The virus is in the saliva of the animal and gets into the body via the wound. It is also possible to become infected if you come in contact with the animal's saliva and then transfer it by touch onto the mucus membranes of the nose, eyes, etc. Scratches are less likely to be a transfer mode but are also possible. (There have been reports of cave explorers getting it by inhaling the virus in caves with huge bat populations.)

Once the virus enters the body it grows through the nervous system toward the brain. Once there it causes severe brain trauma and a very painful death. Rather than go through all the details here, you can get all the information you need from the Iowa Department of Public Health website.

One of them has a really good flow chart to help you decide whether shots are needed or not based on exposure and the type of animal that caused the bite. Also keep in mind that all animal bites, severe scratches, etc. must be reported to this Dept. for follow up.

For additional information on rabies, visit [www.idph.iowa.gov/rabies](http://www.idph.iowa.gov/rabies). CADE has someone on call 24/7 for guidance on rabies exposure criteria and post-exposure prophylaxis recommendations. Between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday call 800-362-2736. After business hours, call 515-323-4360 and ask to talk to an epidemiologist about rabies exposure.