

Rabies



- Rabies is a viral disease of mammals that infects the nervous system and is spread through the bite of a rabid animal.

Species Affected in Colorado

- Skunks
- Bats
- Less commonly, other mammalian species

What to Look For

- Aggression, no fear of humans
- Bats or skunks out during the day
- Disorientation, lethargy
- Difficulty walking
- Excessive salivation



Cause and Transmission

Rabies is a fatal disease of the nervous system. Rabies is caused by a virus and is usually transmitted through the bite of an infected animal. After a bite occurs, the virus multiplies near the bite wound, enters nearby nerves, and eventually travels to the spinal cord and brain. The distance from the bite wound to the brain often dictates how long it takes to see signs of the disease. Although bite wounds are the most effective method of transmission, rabies may also be spread through any contact with an infected animal or the saliva of that animal. In Colorado, skunks and bats are the most commonly affected species, although all mammals can be infected, including humans. There is no effective treatment for rabies, and the disease is fatal. Aggressive vaccination immediately following exposure may prevent infection in humans (called “post-exposure prophylaxis”).

Public Health Concerns

If you or your pet suffers a bite, scratch, or other contact from a wild animal, contact your physician immediately for advice regarding the possible need for rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (see above). Contact may include finding a bat or another wild animal in your home or in the same sleeping area as you or your pet. Do not handle sick wild animals. Keep your pets updated on rabies vaccinations, and contact Colorado Parks and Wildlife if you observe wild animals with signs of rabies.

Additional Information/References

Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment: <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/rabies>
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/>

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