

Rabies In Oregon

Rabies is an acute infection of the central nervous system caused by a neurotropic rhabdovirus. All mammals, including humans, are susceptible to rabies. In humans, rabies causes a rapidly progressive and fatal encephalomyelitis. The incubation period in humans is usually two to 12 weeks, but there have been documented incubation periods as long as seven years. Bites from infected animals constitute the primary route of transmission. Transplanted organs including corneas from patients with undiagnosed rabies have also caused infection in recipients.

In Oregon, the **main reservoirs of rabies are bats**, and animals such as foxes and cats that may come in contact with rabid bats. An average of 10% of the bats tested in Oregon are positive for rabies. Bat contact and bat bites should be carefully evaluated in a timely manner. Thirteen bats tested positive for rabies in 2008, down from a 20-year high of 23 rabid bats in 2006. Oregon State Public Health Laboratories will test most human exposures and Oregon State University Veterinary Diagnostic laboratory should test for animal-to-animal exposures. All potential human exposures should result in a call to a local public health department office.

There are 2 important steps to avoid rabies exposure. **First, under all circumstances, never handle bats.** The bats most likely to come into contact with humans are those most likely to be harboring rabies. This is because rabid bats are often found dead, in odd locations such as broad daylight or laying in the yard or house, and they are commonly unable to fly. If found, call the Oregon Department of Health and ask if testing of a specimen is indicated.

Second, vaccinating our pets helps provide a buffer between known reservoir of rabies and humans. All pets should be maintained current on their rabies vaccination at all times, even indoor only pets. The vaccine will prevent your pet from contracting rabies if exposed to the saliva of a rabid animal. All pets in the state of Oregon with no previous history of vaccination should receive a single vaccine that is boosted after 1 year and then once every 3 years for life. The vaccination is safe and effective in preventing infection. **NOTE: State Public Health Department Guidelines mandate that any unvaccinated pet exposed to a rabid animal should be euthanized.**

Persons not previously immunized for rabies who are exposed to a rabid animal should obtain human rabies immune globulin (HRIG) infiltrated at the site of the bite and five doses of rabies vaccine, one each on days 0, 3, 7, 14 and 28. Though bats are the reservoir in Oregon, canine rabies still accounts for the majority of human rabies cases in other countries. Travelers to rabies-enzootic

Countries should be warned to seek immediate medical care if they are bitten by any mammal.

Helpful links to other rabies information:

Cdc: <http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/history.html>

Dept of Public Health, Oregon:

<http://oregon.gov/DHS/ph/acd/diseases/rabies/rabies.shtml>