

### *Get help*

If you see a suspicious animal where it could be dangerous to people, call the Animal Control Officer at 235-8460. Otherwise, leave it alone. If you find a dead animal in your yard, don't touch it. Using a shovel, bury it deep to keep it away from other animals.

## WHAT TO DO

If you are bitten by an animal which might be rabid, **don't panic!** Modern medical treatment works perfectly well and is no longer the gruesome ordeal of legend.

**First**, wash the bite with plenty of soap and water for at least five minutes and encourage the wound to bleed. This will greatly reduce the chance of infection.

**Second**, call your doctor or the Wellesley Health Department (235-0135; 235-4223). Follow their instructions carefully. Depending on circumstances, further treatment may be unnecessary.

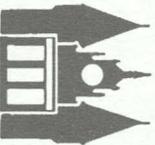
**Third**, contact the Animal Control Officer (235-8460). She will try to capture the animal that bit you and will handle testing arrangements for the animal, if necessary.

## TREATMENT

If your doctor recommends treatment, your wallet will suffer more than you will. Modern treatment calls for a total of six shots in the arm, including one of rabies immune globulin and five of vaccine, administered over a four week period. The series may be shortened to two shots if the person has been previously vaccinated. The shots are discontinued if the animal is tested and found free of rabies.

## PASS THE WORD

Now that you know the basics about rabies, be sure to pass the word along to all your friends and neighbors. Although most of us will never see a case of rabies, it's always good to know what to do—just in case.



Natural Resources Commission  
Wellesley, Massachusetts 02181

*Based upon an article by Peter G. Mirick,  
Editor, Massachusetts Wildlife, a publication  
of the Mass. Division of Fisheries and Wildlife.*

# Rabies!

Just the word sends shudders down one's spine. It conjures up visions of foaming madness; of frenzied and unprovoked attack.

Now an outbreak of raccoon rabies is moving into Massachusetts from Connecticut and the mid-Atlantic states. The news media are showing interest in a potential "scare" story. People need to know what to expect.

Rabies is found on every continent except Australia and Antarctica. All mammals can be infected by it but only carnivores usually transmit it. Rabies in animals is almost always fatal, though some individual animals seem to show a natural immunity.

Louis Pasteur developed the first effective rabies vaccine during the 1880s, well before the disease-causing agent, a bullet-shaped virus, was identified.

Viruses, the simplest forms of life on earth, cannot replicate themselves without assistance. To reproduce, they must invade healthy cells and take over their cellular machinery. The virus does this by inserting its own DNA code into the host cell's codes, which causes the host cell to manufacture more viruses which in turn infect new cells.

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In Massachusetts there are four primary hosts for the rabies virus: bats, foxes, raccoons and skunks. Dogs were important hosts before state law required rabies vaccination for them. Foxes and skunks in our area currently harbor the disease at a low level. Bats also harbor rabies at a low level but seldom act as transmitters except in closed bat caves.



© Nathan Coleman from "RABID"

For the last several years an epidemic of raccoon rabies has been spreading through the southeastern and mid-Atlantic states. Rabid animals were found in Connecticut last year and several have been identified in Massachusetts this year. We can expect that raccoons will die off rapidly for several years, only to bounce back once the epidemic has run its course.

For the last two years local raccoons have been suffering from distemper, a disease which for them is as fatal as rabies. Some of the symptoms of rabies and distemper are similar, but the diseases and their transmission are very different.

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The rabies virus almost always enters a healthy animal through a bite from an infected animal, though it may be spread through a scratch or a break in the skin.

It takes from ten days to six weeks for disease symptoms to become evident. During this incubation period the virus is working its way to the brain and the salivary glands. In the classic form of the disease, the stricken animal then enters a "furious" stage, ready to bite anything within reach. It secretes copious amounts of virus-laden saliva, literally foaming at the mouth. Finally the virus disrupts the entire nervous system. The animal may stagger, walk in circles, become paralyzed and stupified. Within two to ten days from the onset of symptoms, it dies of respiratory failure.

Rabies symptoms may be highly variable in different species and individuals. Non-carnivores often suffer a spreading paralysis that begins with "lockjaw" and ends in death.



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## PREVENTION

### *Get your pets vaccinated*

State law requires that dogs be vaccinated against rabies. This leaves pet cats as the most likely link between humans and rabid wildlife. Unless your cat is kept indoors at all times, it should be vaccinated now. Vaccination of cats may soon be required by state law.

### *Do not approach wildlife*

Teach your children to keep a respectful distance from all wild animals. Stay away from any animal that seems sick, unafraid, or in any way acts abnormally, especially if it is a raccoon, fox, skunk, bat or cat. This rule protects wildlife and protects you.

### *Personal care*

If you often handle wildlife, live or dead, consult your doctor about rabies vaccination. If you work with wild animals or if you butcher game, wear rubber gloves and an apron. Beware of cuts or scratches. Leave clothing and utensils outside for a day or so, after which any rabies virus present would be dead. These precautions can help to protect you from other wildlife diseases, such as Lyme disease.

### *Do not feed wild animals*

Do not attract wildlife with garbage or by feeding your pets outside.

