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5 Rabies Prevention Tips for Dogs

Rabies is a scary viral disease that is transmitted through a bite or scratch—saliva or blood from an infected animal must pass into your dog's bloodstream. Rabies can also be passed to dogs if infected saliva comes in contact with their eyes, mouth, or nose. Worldwide, dogs are the most likely animal to infect humans with rabies, due to their close contact with each other. Once symptoms of the disease develop, rabies is fatal. There is no cure, only prevention. Here are five steps you can take to reduce the risk of your dog contracting rabies.

Vaccinate Your Dog Against Rabies

The most effective thing you can do to protect your dog from getting rabies is to keep her rabies vaccination up-to-date. Depending on your state's laws and your dog's health, vaccinations may be good for one to three years. The rabies vaccine ensures your dog is protected if she is exposed to an infected animal. However, you should still bring your dog to a veterinarian immediately if you suspect she was bitten. The veterinarian will give her a booster vaccine and monitor her for signs of infection. **Do not** try to catch the wild animal, but do try to remember the type of animal and details about the situation.

If your dog is current on her vaccines, you may be able to [quarantine](#) at home (ask your veterinarian about the laws in your location). But, if your dog's rabies vaccination has lapsed, you may be required to place your dog with the veterinarian or the local county animal control facility for a lengthy quarantine before you can take her home.

Avoid Direct Contact with Injured or Dead Wildlife

Even if that opossum was clearly hit by a car, it may also have rabies. Keep pets and children away from injured or dead wildlife. Adults should not touch injured wildlife either without proper precautions (e.g., gloves, towels), and even then, only if they have a plan for where to take the animal. Most veterinarians will accept injured wildlife in order to humanely euthanize it or submit samples for rabies testing. Only some veterinary clinics are able to care for non-domestic animals. In the United States, there are programs in place to vaccinate some species of wildlife against rabies to help prevent transmission to pets and humans.

Supervise Your Dog Outdoors

If your dog likes to chase squirrels, rabbits, or other animals, he could get bitten or scratched. Rabid animals usually behave strangely. They are more aggressive, may appear agitated, are found at times or in locations that are [atypical](#), or they may appear injured due to progressive paralysis. Even if that animal isn't yet showing signs of rabies or other illness, it does not mean it is not infected. This is especially dangerous, because you may not think to bring your dog to the vet for a minor scratch, and that puts him at risk.

Report Sick or Dead Animals

If that raccoon who lives in the empty lot down the street suddenly starts showing up during the day, is acting aggressive, or is showing other changes in behavior, call for assistance. **Never** try to catch a wild animal. If you don't know who to contact, you can call your local police station at the non-emergency number and they can direct you to the proper authorities. In many locations, animal control officers are part the police team and will respond. If the local animal control or other officials think the animal may have contracted rabies, it will be tested. The authorities can then issue an alert to help protect the pets in your neighborhood.

Stay Actively Informed About Rabies

Be aware of the kinds of animals most likely to carry rabies where you live and how to avoid those animals. For example, in the United States overall, bats are more likely than other animals to carry rabies, so don't walk your dog near a roost, especially at dawn and dusk when the bats are flying in and out. In certain parts of the country, skunks or raccoons are the more common rabies carrier, so check with your local health department.

The best step you can take to protect your dog, yourself, and others against rabies is to vaccinate your pet each time he is due. If all of the dogs in your neighborhood are vaccinated, then the rabies virus can't spread into the domesticated population. As a responsible pet parent, protecting your dog against rabies is one of the easiest, most effective things you can do for them.