



Rabies Risk After a Domestic Animal Bite

What is rabies?

Rabies is a disease, caused by the rabies virus, that almost always results in death. It may take several weeks, or even a few years, for people to show symptoms after becoming infected.

How is rabies spread?

The virus is most commonly spread when an animal with rabies bites another animal or human.

How do I know if an animal has rabies?

You cannot tell if an animal has rabies just by looking at it. The only way to tell for sure is to euthanize and test the animal for the virus. Some animals may act more aggressive and some may seem unusually tame. They may also have trouble walking or seem paralyzed.

What is my risk after a bite?

Although the risk of getting rabies from a dog or cat bite in Colorado remains low, we have had cats and dogs test positive for rabies in recent years. The number of animals found with rabies is available on the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) website at

<https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/rabies-data>

How can I be protected from rabies after an animal bite?

The only zero risk options, after receiving a dog or cat bite, are: to watch the biting animal for 10 days (if the animal remains healthy for 10 days after the bite then it did not transmit rabies); to test the biting animal for rabies (this requires euthanizing the animal); or to start post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP).

What is PEP?

After receiving an animal bite, a vaccine can be administered to prevent rabies; this is called post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP). To work, PEP must be started **before** the onset of symptoms. Rabies PEP consists of a series of 4 doses of vaccine and 1 dose of immune globulin (IG). The vaccines are given in your arm, like a flu or tetanus vaccine.

How do I get PEP?

Rabies IG is available locally only in the Emergency Room. If you feel you would like to start PEP, it is advised that you contact the Weld County Department of Public Health and Environment (WCDPHE). Someone from the WCDPHE will ensure the proper vaccine schedule is followed and answer any questions concerning rabies that you may have.

For questions on rabies or initiating PEP please contact the Weld County Department of Public Health and Environment at 970-304-6415.

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