

RABIES | FACT SHEET

BACKGROUND

Rabies is an acute infection of the central nervous system with a fatal outcome and no effective cure. According to the World Health Organization WHO, rabies ranks 12th among the major killer diseases with around 10 million people exposed annually. In the Philippines, rabies continues to be an endemic disease despite the availability of effective and safe vaccines. The incidence of rabies in the country is 6-8 per million populations and this is one of the highest worldwide. The main vector of the disease in the country is the domestic dogs and to a small extent, cats.

LOCAL WOUND CARE

When bitten by a suspected rabid animal (usually a dog or cat), the first thing to do is to wash the wound with soap and water. Clean the wound with an antiseptic such as povidone iodine (betadine) or 70% alcohol. Remedies such as rubbing garlic on the wound or putting penicillin powder on the wound results in secondary bacterial infection and should be avoided.

VACCINATION

Consult the nearest health center, clinic or hospital for anti-rabies and anti-tetanus vaccination. Depending on the severity of the bite, inactivated rabies vaccines with or without the immunoglobulin may be given to you. It is very important that the schedule of vaccination is followed as closely and that all the doses are completed especially if the biting animal is stray, killed and not laboratory tested or proven to have rabies.

OBSERVATION OF THE BITING ANIMAL

Biting animals that are initially healthy at the time of the bite should be observed for 14 days. Animals that are sick at the time of the bite should be sacrificed and the head sent for testing to the rabies laboratory. During the observation period, the animal should be kept leashed or caged, preferably in an area inaccessible to other people, especially children. This will reduce the risk of further exposure to others. The animal should be provided with adequate food and water. Whenever possible, no person with skin wounds should handle the animal. Animal handler should have protective body covers (thick clothing, gloves, masks, boots) or restraining devices (leash or chain, restraining pole, etc.). Disinfect or sterilize areas that get into contact with the animal's body fluids by using soap and hot water, detergent solution, 70% alcohol, iodine or sodium hypochlorite (Lysol). Watch out for the development of any of the following signs:

1. Sudden change in behavior (from mild to vicious temperament or vice);
2. Characteristic hoarse howl;
3. Watchful, apprehensive expression of the eyes, staring, blank gaze drooling of saliva;
4. Paralysis of uncoordinated gait of hind legs;
5. Marked excitability and restlessness, pacing in cage;
6. If restrained, attacks objects within range;
7. If at large, runs aimlessly, biting anything in its way;
8. Depraved appetite, self-mutilation;
9. In some cases, lies quiescent, biting when provoked snaps at imaginary objects;
10. Paralysis of lower jaw and tongue; inability to drink; and
11. Sudden death without associated symptoms.

The animal should be sacrificed when it poses grave danger to the public at large, if it develops any of the above signs. Whenever possible, a veterinarian should be consulted. When killing the animal, avoid damaging the head. The animal's head should be cut off and sent to any of the following rabies laboratories:

- 1) RITM- Alabang, Muntinlupa City;
- 2) San Lazaro Hospital - Sta. Cruz, Manila;
- 3) NADDL, Bureau of Animal Industry, Quezon City;
- 4) Regional Animal Disease laboratories of Regions: (a) Region I - Sta. Barbara, Pangasinan; (b) Region 2 -Tuguegarao, Cagayan Valley; (c) Region 3 - San Fernando, Pampanga; (d) Region 5 - Albay; (e) Region 7 - Cebu City; (f) Region 9 - Zamboanga City; (g) Region 10 - Cagayan de Oro; or (h) Region 11 - Davao City.





RABIES | FACT SHEET

HOW TO PREPARE AND TRANSPORT THE ANIMAL'S HEAD:

1. Only the head is necessary for testing. Do not submit the whole body of the animal.
2. Cut off the animal's head at the base of the neck using a sharp knife. An apron/ gown, mask, glasses and gloves should be worn when this is done.
3. Place the head in a leak-proof container or a double plastic bag. This, in turn, is placed in a bigger container with liberal amounts of ice/dry ice.
4. Freezing of the specimen is necessary if the transit time will exceed 48 hours.
5. Do not put the head in any chemical disinfectants or preservatives such as formalin, alcohol, etc.
6. Never try to extract the brain from the skull. This is dangerous and will expose you to the virus.

