

Recognizing Rabies

Rabies is a very serious threat to human health. With rare exception, once an exposure to the disease progresses to active symptoms, it almost always results in death. Thus, working early in the timeframe following a possible exposure to determine if medical intervention is warranted, is critical. An animal may be infected with rabies for a long time before it shows symptoms, anywhere from two weeks to many months. (The incubation period is usually two to three weeks.) If the biting animal is available to observe for illness, no medical intervention is probably warranted. However, when the biting animal is not available, public health officials and animal control officers will work together to provide the best and most appropriate post-bite recommendations. Here are some of the symptoms of rabies to be aware of when observing animals:

- Unprovoked aggression (“furious” rabies) – some animals may attack anything that moves, or even inanimate objects.
- Unusual friendliness (“dumb” rabies)
- Animal may stumble, fall, appear disoriented or uncoordinated, or wander aimlessly.
- Paralysis, often begins in the hind legs or throat – paralysis of the throat muscles can cause the animal to bark, whine, drool, choke, or froth at the mouth.
- Vocalizations can range from chattering to shrill screaming.
- Nocturnal animals may become unusually active during the day. (Remember, some daytime activity is normal, especially when nocturnal animals are feeding their young.)