



Rabies Information

What is rabies?

Rabies is a viral infection transmitted in the saliva of infected mammals. The virus enters the central nervous system of the host, causing inflammation of the brain and spinal cord that is almost always fatal.

Wildlife is the most important potential source of infection for both humans and domestic animals in the United States. Although all species of mammals are susceptible to rabies virus infection, it is most often found in raccoons, skunks, foxes, coyotes, and several species of insectivorous bats.

How does Hall County Animal Services handle rabies cases?

When contact between a wild animal and a pet or person occurs, the animal is captured and shipped to the Georgia Public Health Lab – Virology Section in Decatur, Ga., for testing. If the animal is confirmed to have rabies, positive alert signs will be posted in the area where the rabid animal was located. The media is also notified and an alert is placed on hallcounty.org. Residents are advised to be on the lookout for animals acting abnormally and to contact Hall County Animal Services at 770-531-6830 or during non-working hours call Hall County Dispatch at 770-536-8812.

How can I protect myself and my pets?

Reducing the risk of rabies in domestic animals and limiting contact with wild animals are central to the prevention of human rabies. Vaccination of all domestic dogs, cats, and ferrets coupled with the systematic removal of stray animals that are at risk of exposure to rabid wildlife, are basic elements of a rabies control program.

Vaccines are available at the Hall County Animal Shelter for \$10 Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., at 1688 Barber Road, Gainesville.

Georgia law (Rabies Control Law-O.C.G.A-31-19) requires that all owned dogs and cats be vaccinated against rabies by a licensed veterinarian using approved vaccines in accordance with the national Compendium of Animal Rabies Prevention and Control (see pages 50-60). Domestic ferrets need to be vaccinated against rabies, according to the national Compendium of Animal Rabies Prevention and Control (see pages 50-60), and Georgia law (O.C.G.A-27-5-5).

What happens if I or my pet is bitten?

The Georgia Division of Public Health recommends immediate euthanization of an unvaccinated pet that comes in contact with a rabid animal. If the owner is unwilling to have this done, the animal should be placed in strict isolation for 6 months and vaccinated either upon entry to isolation OR 1 month before being released. Animals with expired vaccinations need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

A vaccinated pet exposed to rabies must be revaccinated immediately and be observed closely by the owner for 45 days.

Human rabies is a completely preventable disease if the risk of acquisition is appreciated and appropriate rabies post-exposure treatment (consisting of wound care as well as both active and passive immunization) is obtained. Because rabies is a fatal disease, the goal of public health is, first, to prevent human exposure to rabies by education and, second, to prevent the disease by administering rabies post exposure prophylaxis (PEP) if exposure occurs. Tens of thousands of people are successfully treated each year after being bitten by an animal that may have rabies.

In the United States, indigenously acquired rabies among humans has declined markedly in recent years. The decline is, in part, due to vaccination and animal control programs begun in the 1940s that have practically eliminated the domestic dog as a reservoir of rabies and also to the development of effective human rabies vaccines and rabies immune globulin.