Rabies - Frequently Asked Questions

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What is rabies?

Rabies is a virus that infects the central nervous system in mammals. The disease is invariably fatal if left untreated; however, effective vaccines are available to protect people and pets.

How do you contract rabies?

Rabies is passed along through contact with an infected animal's saliva and is almost always transmitted when an infected animal bites an uninfected animal or person. People usually get rabies from the bite of a rabid animal. It is also possible, but quite rare, that people may get rabies if infectious material from a rabid animal, such as saliva, gets directly into their eyes, nose, mouth, or a wound.

Why should I be worried about rabies in wildlife?

Rabies is a serious public health concern because if left untreated it is always fatal. Costs associated with detection, prevention and control of rabies exceeds $300 million annually. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 90% of reported rabies cases in the United States are in wildlife.

How can I tell if an animal has rabies?

The test to determine if an animal has contracted the rabies virus requires them to be euthanized to test the cells of the brainstem. Some of the visible signs of a rabid

animal could include any of the following symptoms: aggressive behavior, attacking for no reason, lethargic, walking in a circle, confused, and drunk-like. Wildlife should never be approached at any time. If you have any questions about wildlife, please contact USDA's Wildlife Services at 1-866-4-USDA-WS (1-866-487-3297).

What should I do if I'm bitten by an animal?

Wash the wounds thoroughly with soap and water as a first aid precaution. Call your doctor or local health department. If it is a domestic animal, get the name and address of the animal's owner. If it is a wild animal, contact your local health department, animal control, or professional wildlife trapper for assistance. If the animal is dead, wear gloves or use a shovel to move the animal. If testing is necessary, put the carcass into a heavy plastic bag and place it in a cold area away from people and other animals. Clean the area where the animal was found with one part bleach to ten parts water. Call your local health department for further instructions.

Is this bait dangerous?

The vaccine in these baits cannot cause rabies and has been shown to be safe in more than 60 different species of animals, including cats and dogs.

Can I get rabies from contact with the vaccine?

No. The vaccine does not contain the whole rabies virus, but only a single gene from the outer coating of the rabies virus. The virus that carries this single gene could potentially cause a local pox-type infection in people who are pregnant or have an immunodeficiency disease. If you come into contact with the vaccine, wash the affected area thoroughly with soap and water and call your local health authorities at 1-877-RABORAL (1-877-722-6725 for further instructions and referral.

What if I find a bait near my home?

It is best to leave the bait where you found it unless it is on your lawn, driveway, or other area not likely to attract a raccoon. While wearing a glove or other protective covering (i.e. plastic bag), you can move the bait to an area of thicker cover where a raccoon will be more likely to find it. As with any biological entity, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after any contact with a bait.

Why do I need to wear a glove when handling a bait?

An intact bait will not harm you but the fish smell may get on your skin and is often objectionable to people. If a bait is broken and pink liquid (vaccine) is visible, while wearing gloves you may place the bait in a bag and dispose of it with your regular trash because the bait will no longer be effective. As with any biological entity, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after any contact with a bait. If you suspect you may have been exposed to the vaccine please call Merial at 1-877-RABORAL (1-877-722-6725).

What if I do not have a glove?

You can use a plastic bag, something to prevent you from coming into direct contact with the bait and can be disposed of after use. If you should pick up a bait without wearing a glove, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.

What if my child finds a bait?

The smell of the bait generally prevents children from playing with or tasting them. If your child were to bring you an intact bait, you may place the bait into an area of thick vegetation; if your child brings you a broken bait, wash the exposed skin and call Merial at 1-877-RABORAL (1-877-722-6725), for further instructions and referral. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after any contact with a bait.

What if my dog or cat eats a bait?

This vaccine has been shown to be safe in over 60 different species of animals, including domestic dogs and cats. Eating a large number of baits may cause a temporarily upset stomach in your pet but does not pose a long-term health risk. Do not attempt to remove a bait from your dog's mouth; doing so may cause you to be bitten. If your pet becomes ill from consuming baits, please contact your veterinarian.

Can I use this bait to vaccinate my dog or cat?

No. This vaccine is only approved for use in wildlife. Your pet should be vaccinated by a veterinarian in accordance with state and local laws.

How does a raccoon, coyote, or gray fox get vaccinated by eating the bait?

The vaccine is contained inside a plastic packet which is waxed to the inside of the fishmeal outer shell or covered with fishmeal crumbs. When an animal eats through the outer coating, the vaccine packet is punctured allowing the animal to swallow the vaccine. The raccoon's immune system is then tricked into thinking it has been exposed to the rabies virus and makes antibodies to fight the disease. The blueprint on how to make these antibodies is stored in the raccoon's immune system allowing its body to respond quickly should it be exposed to a rabid animal.

How long does the vaccine last?

Research suggests this vaccine should be effective for one year or more, however it is difficult to determine how immune systems in individual animals will respond to the vaccine.

How do you distribute baits over cities and suburban areas?

WS distributes baits in urban and suburban areas primarily by hand with the assistance of volunteers from local communities. In some limited situations, baits are distributed in urban and suburban areas by helicopter. This is done to get the most effective bait distribution and to minimize human contact with baits.

What type of aircraft are used to distribute baits?

Depending on the distribution area and availability, a helicopter or fixed wing aircraft may be utilized. The fixed wing aircraft could either be a Beechcraft King Air or a Dehaviland Twin Otter.

What can I do to prevent rabies?

Avoid all contact with all wild animals. Make sure your pets are vaccinated in accordance with state and local laws. Report any suspicious acting animals to USDA's Wildlife Services at 1-866-4-USDA-WS (1-866-487-3297). Do not relocate wildlife.

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