

Worried about rabies? Here's what to do if you're bitten by an animal

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Cases of North Carolinians being bit by rabid foxes this summer have raised concerns about the risk of rabies and other health concerns associated with animal bites.

Although rabies is rare in humans in the United States, according to experts, there are still things to watch out for and steps you should take if you're bitten by an animal, especially a [wild animal](#).

Taking action when appropriate can help stave off serious complications, including disease and infection, but there are also plenty of reasons to not panic immediately if bit.

Here's what to know about rabies, animal bites and how to handle potential run-ins with wildlife:

What animals can carry rabies?

Only mammals can carry rabies, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, but some types of animals are more likely than others to actually get infected.

Rabies is rare in pets and livestock because most are vaccinated against the disease, the CDC advises. But wild animals are a different story.

"In the United States, more than 90% of reported cases of rabies in animals occur in wildlife," the [public health agency](#) says. "The wild animals that most commonly carry rabies in the United States are raccoons, skunks, bats, and foxes."

"The only way to know for sure if an animal" is rabid, the CDC adds, is to have it tested. Some [infected animals](#), though, may show symptoms such as aggressiveness and excessive drooling.

Because humans are mammals, they too can contract rabies. Actual cases in people are rare—"only 1 to 3 cases" are found in the U.S. each year, per the CDC—but many people have to go through "post-exposure prophylaxis" treatment "after being bitten or scratched by an infected or

suspected infected animal."

How to treat an animal bite

If you're bitten or scratched by an animal but it's only a minor wound, the Mayo Clinic advises, you should clean the wound using soap and water, apply an antibiotic ointment or cream and cover the wound with a bandage.

If the wound "is a deep puncture or you're not sure how serious it is," you should get immediate medical attention. If you're "bleeding significantly," you should "first apply pressure with a bandage or clean cloth to stop the bleeding."

And if you spike a fever, have pain or notice redness, swelling or oozing, you should also see a doctor as soon as possible.

If you haven't had a tetanus shot in the last 10 years, you may need to get a booster shot "if the wound is deep or dirty," the Mayo Clinic adds.

When bitten by an animal that's someone's pet, you should verify that the pet is up-to-date on its rabies vaccinations. If the animal that bit you was a wild animal and was acting strangely, you should seek [medical care](#) immediately so that prophylactic rabies treatment can potentially be given, per the Mayo Clinic.

What to do with an animal that bit a human

The CDC recommends contacting [public health](#) and animal health experts—such as your local health department, animal control and/or a veterinarian—about an animal that's bitten a human.

"A healthy dog, cat, or ferret that bites a person should be confined and observed daily for 10 days ... If the animal develops signs suggestive of rabies, it should be euthanized by an animal health professional and the head submitted to a diagnostic laboratory for testing," the agency says.

Strays or [wild animals](#), the CDC adds, "may be euthanized immediately by an [animal health](#) professional and the head should be submitted for rabies testing."

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