



Animal Bites and Rabies

Awareness guide — World Rabies Day 2026 — “Approach with Awareness”

Vector-Borne and Zoonotic Diseases Control | Public Health | Health Services | Jeddah Second Health Cluster

DJ Pets Park · 28 September

1. Why it matters

Direct contact with pets, as happens during a visit to a pet park, can expose visitors to bites or scratches. Although most vaccinated pets are safe, knowing how to act correctly when a bite occurs, and when to seek medical care, protects lives and prevents serious diseases — above all rabies.

2. What is rabies?

Rabies is an acute viral disease of the central nervous system, usually transmitted to humans through the saliva of an infected animal. It is almost 100% fatal once clinical symptoms appear, yet it is entirely preventable when the right action is taken immediately after exposure.

3. How does rabies spread?

- Through a bite or scratch from an infected animal (dogs cause around 99% of human rabies cases worldwide).
- Contact between an infected animal's saliva and an open wound or mucous membrane (eyes or mouth).
- Infection can also come from infected cats, wild animals and bats.
- Rabies is not transmitted through normal contact with a healthy animal, through the air, or between people in daily life.

4. Symptoms and warning signs in people

The incubation period is usually 2–3 months, and may range from one week to a full year depending on the wound site and viral load. Early symptoms include fever, pain and tingling at the wound, then the illness develops into one of two forms:

Furious form

Hyperactivity, hallucinations, fear of water (hydrophobia), and death within a few days.

Paralytic form

About 20% of cases; it progresses more slowly with gradual paralysis.

Once clinical symptoms appear there is no effective treatment and the disease is fatal in the vast majority of cases — so immediate action after exposure is the only decisive line of defence.

5. Immediate first aid after a bite or scratch



- 1 Wash the wound immediately with running water and soap for at least 15 minutes — by far the most important step in reducing the risk of infection.



- 2 Apply a suitable antiseptic (such as povidone-iodine or alcohol) after washing, if available.



- 3 Avoid tight bandaging or immediate suturing where possible, and go straight to the nearest health facility.



- 4 Do not suck the wound or apply home substances (such as herbs or soil).

6. When are vaccine and immunoglobulin needed? (post-exposure prophylaxis)

Exposures are classified into the following three WHO categories, which determine the need for rabies vaccine and/or immunoglobulin:

Category	Type of exposure	Required action
I	Touching or being licked by an animal on intact, unbroken skin.	Wash the skin only — no vaccine or immunoglobulin needed.
II	Minor scratches or superficial bites without bleeding.	Wash the wound immediately + rabies vaccine (doses per the approved medical schedule).
III	Deep penetrating bites or scratches, saliva contact with a mucous membrane or open wound, or any bat exposure.	Wash the wound immediately + rabies vaccine + rabies immunoglobulin infiltrated around the wound.

Note: The appropriate post-exposure treatment is decided by the treating medical team based on the wound assessment, the biting animal's condition, and its vaccination record if available.

7. Preventing animal bites and rabies

- Vaccinate pets (dogs and cats) against rabies regularly with a licensed veterinarian.
- Do not approach or try to pet stray or unfamiliar animals.
- Supervise children directly whenever they are near any animal, even a pet.
- Avoid provoking or petting an animal that is eating, sleeping, nursing its young, or appears frightened or sick.
- Report immediately any animal showing abnormal behaviour (unprovoked aggression, drooling, staggering) to the authorities.

How do we handle animals safely?

Illustrated awareness material for children and families — four moments to remember on every visit.



Ask first... then approach calmly

Before touching any pet, ask the owner, walk up calmly from the front, and offer an open palm for the animal to sniff.



Unfamiliar animals: watch from afar

Never touch stray animals or bats, even if they look calm or friendly — move away and tell an adult or park management.



Bite or scratch? Wash for 15 minutes

The first and most important action: running water and soap for a full 15 minutes, then the nearest health facility the same day.



Vaccination protects the animal and the family

Vaccinate dogs and cats against rabies with a licensed vet, keep the vaccination card and follow the dose dates.

Do

- Ask the owner before touching, and approach calmly from the front, never from behind.
- Open your palm slowly and let the animal sniff it before petting.
- Pet the back or shoulder gently, and avoid the face, tail and ears.
- Wash your hands with soap and water after touching any animal.
- Step away calmly if the animal looks tense: ears back, growling, or a stiff tail.

Don't

- Do not touch stray or unfamiliar animals, and never touch bats.
- Do not disturb an animal that is eating, sleeping or nursing its young.
- Do not run or shout around animals, and never pull a tail or ear.
- Do not bring your face close to an animal's mouth or try to kiss it.
- Do not open animal enclosures or put your hand between the bars.

Quick facts

◆ Rabies causes about 59,000 deaths worldwide every year, 40% of them among children under 15.

◆ More than 99% of human rabies cases originate from dog bites.

◆ Rabies is almost always fatal after symptoms appear, yet it is 100% preventable with correct action right after exposure.

◆ Washing the wound with soap and water for 15 minutes greatly lowers the risk of virus transmission.

8. Enquiries and support

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If you are bitten or scratched by an animal, go immediately to the nearest health facility. For general enquiries, contact the interactive call centre on 937.

9. References

- World Health Organization (WHO). Rabies — Fact sheet. 2026.
<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/rabies>
- World Health Organization (WHO). Rabies vaccines and immunoglobulins: position paper, April 2018.
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- US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Rabies post-exposure prophylaxis guidance.
<https://www.cdc.gov/rabies/hcp/clinical-care/post-exposure-prophylaxis.html>
- Saudi Ministry of Health. Rabies — awareness and educational content, infectious diseases.
<https://www.moh.gov.sa/HealthAwareness/EducationalContent/Diseases/Infectious/Pages/002.aspx>



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This content is general awareness material and does not replace medical advice. After any bite or scratch, visit the nearest health centre immediately.