



What is rabies?

Rabies is a fatal zoonotic disease - a disease that can be transmitted to humans from animals - that affects the nervous system of warm blooded animals.

Source: Animal Production & Health (AP&H) Division – Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries

Can the consumption of meat from a rabies infected animal transmit rabies?

Consumption of the meat from an animal with rabies is strongly discouraged.

Although no human infection has been linked to the



consumption of meat from a rabid animal, butchering or handling of the carcass may result in contact with infectious material (e.g. brain and saliva) that may potentially transmit rabies. Therefore, it is not advisable to butcher or consume meat from an infected animal. The carcass should be buried or burned if possible, after consulting with your State Veterinarian.

Source: Animal Production & Health (AP&H) Division – Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries

What are the signs of rabies in an animal?

Clinical signs of rabies may vary depending on the part of the brain infected with the virus and the species of the animal.



Typically signs will include sudden behavioural changes, progressive paralysis (inability to move), excessive salivation (drooling) and death.

There are two general forms of rabies: (a) furious rabies and (b) dumb or paralytic rabies. Furious rabies is the type most commonly seen in the dog and has not been demonstrated in Trinidad since 1914. In this form of the disease the animal will display sudden behaviour changes (e.g. loss of natural caution in wild animal, unusual aggression in domestic animals) may attack without provocation and have muscular tremors and seizures leading to death.

In the paralytic form of the disease, which is the type that may develop in unvaccinated ruminants in Trinidad, the animal will appear depressed, have problems swallowing, display hind limb weakness which progresses to paralysis and death.

Source: Animal Production & Health (AP&H) Division – Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries

How does Rabies usually spread to Humans?



The main route of transmission of rabies is through the bite of an infected animal (usually a dog or bat), but infection can also occur if

infected saliva enters an open wound (e.g. a scratch or cut) or contacts mucous membranes of the mouth, nasal cavity or eyes. Infection has also been shown to occur when the virus is aerosolized such as in bat caves or when infected tissue is being manipulated in laboratories.

Source: Animal Production & Health (AP&H) Division – Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries

What are the Signs of Rabies in Humans?

Clinical signs of rabies usually appear 1 to 3 months after exposure but this period is extremely variable and depends on the route of exposure, extent of exposure and post exposure treatment.



Typical symptoms initially include fever, pain or unusual sensation at the bite or scratch site (tingling, pricking or burning). Later as the virus spreads up the spinal cord to the brain, muscle paralysis or hyperactivity develops depending on the form of the disease (furious or paralytic), the characteristic sign of hydrophobia and difficulty swallowing, followed by coma and death by cardio-respiratory arrest. There has not been a case of human rabies in Trinidad since 1937.

Source: Animal Production & Health (AP&H) Division – Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries

What should I do if I have had contact with a Bat?



Bats are usually shy and gentle animals, and are critically important to our ecosystems. You cannot get rabies just from seeing or being near a bat. However, a bat being handled can bite in self-defence and wounds may not always be obviously visible. Therefore, attention must be paid to the possibility of exposures or bites in situations where people were in close contact with bats. If bitten by a bat, wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water and contact your physician.

If you are able to approach a bat which cannot fly, is on the floor, clinging to the wall or found in a place where bats are not usually seen, then it is more likely to be sick or injured and it is advised that you **DO NOT TOUCH** the bat.

If you are unsure of your exposure please contact the Anti-rabies Unit, Ministry of Agriculture Land and Fisheries or the Veterinary Public health Unit, Ministry of Health to request an investigation and assessment.

Source: Animal Production & Health (AP&H) Division – Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries

How can Rabies be prevented?

Rabies can be prevented in humans by pre-exposure vaccination which is only necessary for those at high risk of exposure through their job or geographic location. Animal vaccination can reduce the number of human exposures by



immunizing the animal host. Dogs living in canine rabies endemic areas (not Trinidad) are routinely vaccinated and it is advised that animals going to an endemic area are vaccinated prior to travel.

Wild mammals are also vaccinated in areas where wild terrestrial animals are the reservoir, e.g. raccoons and skunks in the United States. In Trinidad, it is legislated under the Paralytic rabies Regulations (Animal Disease and Importation Act 1954) that farmers make their animals available for vaccination during routine national livestock vaccination programs.

Source: Animal Production & Health (AP&H) Division – Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries

Who is at Risk for Contracting Rabies?



Globally, persons living in rural areas of Africa and Asia are at most risk of contracting the disease as these countries account for >95% of human rabies cases worldwide. Visitors to these areas who are scheduled for extensive periods of time outdoors should discuss pre-exposure vaccination with their doctor. Children are at greater risk than adults due the fact that they are more likely to play with animals and are less likely to report a bite or scratch.

In areas where rabies occurs occupational groups that have regular contact with animals such as veterinarians, wildlife officers and researchers should be routinely vaccinated against rabies (or blood antibody titers conducted to determine the need to revaccinate) as long as the exposure exists.

Abattoir workers in these areas should take precautions to avoid contact with saliva, salivary glands and nervous tissue of infected animals. In the event that the animal is rabies-infected, handling of these infected tissues/material may put the individual at risk of contracting the virus through breaks in their skin. Therefore specialized personal protective equipment should be used and if exposure to a rabies infected carcass is suspected medical consult should be sought.

Source: Animal Production & Health (AP&H) Division – Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries