

Health Department's role in investigating animal bites

Our data shows children under ten years of age are the most likely victims of dog bites. The Wayne County Health Department would like to advise the general public of their role in investigating a dog bite. The health department **MUST** be notified of all animal bites.

History of the animal's vaccination for rabies is important when determining the steps for observing the animal. All cats, dogs and ferrets must be observed for 10 days after a bite or scratch of a human occurs. If it is not, the animal may need to be quarantined and observed for rabies. In order to conduct a thorough rabies investigation the animal has to be alive and healthy 10 days after the incident to determine if the animal is infected with rabies. Animals that are killed cannot be observed and must be tested for rabies. If an animal is shot in the head testing cannot be performed. When an animal cannot be tested and determined free of rabies then a recommendation is given to the victim to talk to their doctor about rabies vaccine.

If you have been bitten or scratched by an animal and there is bleeding, apply pressure to the wound with a clean dry cloth. If the wound is superficial, wash the area thoroughly with soap and water. Apply antibiotic ointment and cover with a bandage. If the bite occurred on the head or the face or if it is a deep wound, seek medical attention immediately.

Rabies is a disease that is caused by a virus that attacks the nervous system. It can be spread through the bite from an animal that has the virus. In most cases in the U.S., an individual may get rabies from the bite of a wild animal, such as a skunk or raccoon. During the first stage of the illness, the individual may develop a headache, fever, decreased appetite, vomiting and malaise. There may also be itching and pain at the bite wound. During the second stage of the illness, the individual may be agitated or disoriented, have difficulty swallowing, and may develop paralysis or coma. Without treatment, rabies is almost always fatal. However, if rabies exposure is identified early, a series of vaccinations may be recommended.

To prevent animal bites, the Wayne County Health Department recommends the following:

- **Keeping all pets on a leash when out in public.**
- **Supervise your young children with pets.**
- **Make sure your dogs and cats are up to date on their rabies vaccinations.**
- **Do not approach anyone else's dog, cat, or a wild animal. More specifically, never reach through a fence to pet a dog or approach a dog that is tethered in the yard.**
- **Do not try to separate fighting animals.**