



## Rabies

**\*Rabies is a zoonotic disease\***

**Disease Name:** Rabies, Rhabdovirus

**Disease Type:** Viral

**Transmission:** The virus is usually transmitted through a bite wound from an infected animal but the virus can also enter through open wounds, cuts in the skin, abrasions, or direct contact with the mucous membranes (mouth or eyes) of infected animals.

**Frequency:** Low

**Incubation period:** Typically, 2-6 weeks, although longer incubation periods have been reported. Horses suspected of infection should be observed for up to 6 months.

**Carrier status:** Infected horses are carriers and can transmit the virus to other horses and humans through bite wounds.

**Latency:** Incubation period is variable but animals have been known to shed the virus before clinical signs appear.

**Severity:** Rabies is fatal.

**Clinical signs:** The clinical signs of rabies can be highly variable and can include lameness, colic, painful urination (can present as colic, stretching to urinate), and neurologic abnormalities. Insidious onset (slow to develop clinical signs) is extremely common.

- In unvaccinated horses, rabies is rapidly progressive after onset of clinical signs with death occurring 5-7 days following the onset of clinical signs.
- Physical signs may include:
  - Fever
  - Loss of appetite
  - Blindness
  - Difficulty swallowing
  - Hypersensitivity of the skin- can sometimes present as self-mutilation
  - Muscle twitching
  - Lameness
  - Paresis and/or ataxia- loss of body control
  - Incontinence
  - Paralysis – beginning in the extremities
  - Sudden death

## Equine Disease Communication Center: Disease Factsheet

- Behavioral signs:
  - Dumb form: depression/stupor
  - Furious form: mania – excitable, fearful, may exhibit aggression. **These horses are extremely dangerous.**

**Diagnosis:** There is no ante-mortem (prior to death) test for rabies. Diagnosis is made by testing brain samples during a necropsy which requires specific biosecurity measures. Veterinarian will attempt rule out other possible causes of disease such as EEE, WNV, EHM, EPM, and other diseases known to cause similar clinical signs.

**Treatment:** There is no cure for rabies. Prophylactic treatment has been effective if administered after exposure but before onset of clinical signs. Rabies is fatal in all horses with clinical signs.

**Prognosis:** Rabies is incurable.

**Prevention:** Rabies vaccines are highly effective and are included in the AAEP list of Core Vaccinations. Horses should be vaccinated annually to maintain immunity. Consult your veterinarian to establish a vaccination schedule.

**Biosecurity:** Feeding and/or housing of wild animals as pets is highly discouraged. Notify local animal control of any wild animals displaying abnormal behaviors. Contact your veterinarian about any suspected exposure, including animal bites to determine, if prophylactic measures should be taken.