



Skunk Rabies in Tennessee

Rabies, one of the oldest known viral diseases, causes a fatal infection in unvaccinated mammals. In the United States wild animals have replaced the domestic dog as the primary reservoir for the disease because of the effectiveness of vaccination and control programs. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that wildlife currently account for greater than 90 percent of rabies cases in the United States. Rabies is most commonly transmitted in the saliva of rabid animals. This normally occurs through a bite although saliva can potentially transmit rabies virus if it comes in contact with mucous membranes or fresh open wounds.



The striped skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*) is the most common wildlife species found to be infected with rabies in Tennessee. Skunk rabies occurs every year in middle Tennessee. There are a few important facts to remember about wildlife and skunk rabies to protect your family and pets:

- Avoid contact with animals, wild or domestic, that are acting abnormally.
- Abnormal behavior may include being active during daylight hours, appearing to have no fear of humans or animals, being easy to approach, acting aggressively, or acting listless or sick.
- Abnormally acting skunks are more likely to be infected with rabies.
- If you see an abnormally acting skunk, leave it alone, restrict pets from approaching the skunk, and contact your local animal control agency.
- If pets come in contact with an abnormally acting skunk, contact your local animal control or veterinarian.
- If a person comes in contact with a potentially rabid animal, they should immediately consult a physician and contact the local health department.
- The most important thing you can do to protect your family and pets is to be sure your pets are currently vaccinated for rabies. Consult a veterinarian if you are unsure about the vaccination status of your pets.

For additional information:

Tennessee Department of Health, 615-741-7247

CDC (<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/rabies/>)

USDA-Wildlife Services (<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ws/rabies/index.html>)