



Rabies

Overview

- Rabies is a serious disease that damages the brain and nerves. It spreads in saliva (usually through bites) and can affect any mammal, including dogs, cats, ferrets and humans.
- Fortunately, the UK is free from rabies at the moment, but many countries aren't (e.g. Poland and Turkey).
- **If you are travelling with your pet, make sure you vaccinate them against rabies and follow pet travel rules.**
- If you are importing a pet from another country, you will need to follow the rules around pet importation.
- Sadly, there is no treatment for rabies and if caught, it causes death.

What is rabies?

Rabies is a deadly disease caused by a virus that damages the brain and nerves. The rabies virus spreads in saliva (spit), often through a bite, and can affect any mammal including dogs, cats, ferrets, humans and wild animals. Sadly, rabies is a fatal disease for which there is no cure. Fortunately, a rabies vaccination is available (but this is only necessary for pets travelling outside the UK).

Symptoms

Symptoms of rabies can take several weeks after infection to develop, but once they appear, they tend to become severe very quickly. Symptoms often include:

- Sudden changes in behaviour such as:
 - Becoming over friendly and attention seeking
 - Becoming fearful and aggressive
- Paralysis and weakness such as:
 - Droopy face
 - Excessive drooling



- Muscle weakness
- Difficulty walking
- [Seizures](#)
- Coma and death
- Noise and light sensitivity

Remember: the UK is currently free from rabies so it's extremely unlikely unless your pet has travelled abroad and met an infected animal.

When to contact your vet

Contact your vet urgently if your pet has a sudden change of behaviour or any of the symptoms above, especially if they have been abroad. **You know your dog – if they don't have the symptoms listed above but you are concerned, it's always best to contact your vet.**

Treatment and outlook

Sadly, there is no treatment for rabies and it's always fatal. It's only possible to confirm rabies at post-mortem (after death). Anyone (animal or human) in contact with an infected animal is at risk of getting the disease if they are bitten.

Prevention

The only way to prevent rabies is to vaccinate against it. There is no need to vaccinate against rabies if your pet only ever travels within the UK, but **rabies vaccination is compulsory for pets that travel outside of the UK**. There are strict rules in place to keep the UK free of rabies - unvaccinated pets smuggled into the UK put lives at risk. It's not always obvious if a pet has rabies, they can look healthy for several weeks after catching it. Read the government guidelines and speak to your vet if you want to travel abroad with your pet. Similarly, speak to your vet if you want to rescue a pet from abroad. Remember, rescue centres in the UK are often full to capacity and there are many lovely pets waiting for a home in the UK.

Rabies in bats

Although the UK is currently free from rabies there is a similar virus called 'Lyssavirus' which infects some wild bats. It's spread in the same way as



rabies (through saliva in a bite), so the risk to humans is incredibly low unless they handle bats regularly.

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