

Don't Risk Rabies

Get the facts on how to prevent this serious disease. Vaccination remains the best prevention.

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Rabies can infect any mammal, but cats are highly susceptible. Since 1980, more rabies cases have been reported in cats than in dogs. This is a serious disease. Once the virus has entered the nervous system, there is no effective cure and the disease is fatal. All cats need rabies vaccination for their own safety and yours. Indoor-only cats also need rabies vaccines because there is always a chance of them getting out and becoming exposed, or for an animal, such as a rabid bat, getting into your home where it could come in contact with your pet. "We have had two cases of rabid bats found in people's homes in the last five years in our town," says Tom Elston, DVM, lead veterinarian at T.H.E. Cat Hospital in Tustin, Calif. "So we do recommend rabies vaccines even for indoor cats. Since you can't identify for certain whether a cat was bitten, the unvaccinated cats would have to be quarantined for six months." There is a small potential risk of side effects from the vaccine, but this is far outweighed by the seriousness of this disease. Discuss vaccine choices with your veterinarian. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, humans generally get rabies from being bitten by a rabid animal. Rarely, people can get this disease if infectious material, such as saliva, from a rabid animal gets directly into the person's eyes, nose, mouth or a wound. If you suspect you have been exposed to rabies, talk to a health care provider immediately. There's no reason to fear the reputation of the old, painful intraperitoneal vaccines that were once used; advances in vaccine development made injections in the stomach obsolete.

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