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**Rabies in the Northwest Territories – Frequently Asked Questions**

Rabies is a serious and usually fatal disease of the brain carried by some Arctic foxes in the Northwest Territories. The disease can go through cycles but is always present in the Arctic. There has recently been an increase in rabies cases in Tuktoyaktuk, which suggests we may be at the high point in the cycle.

**What causes rabies?**

Rabies is caused by a virus spread in the saliva of infected animals. All warm-blooded mammals can be infected, including people. You can get rabies if you are bitten by an infected animal or if saliva from an infected animal comes into contact with your skin, eyes, nose, lips, cuts or scratches.

**What are the signs of rabies?**

Animals may act differently than normal. Wild animals often lose their fear of humans and may become vicious and attack for no reason. They can also appear to be “foaming at the mouth.” Rabid animals may appear weak or paralyzed, walk differently or backwards, have trouble swallowing or appear to be choking.

***If you are bitten or scratched by any unfamiliar animal, call or visit your local health unit immediately. If you have been exposed to rabies, it is absolutely crucial that you seek medical attention so that preventative treatment for rabies is started as soon as possible.***

**How can I protect myself?**

Rabies is a threat to the health of our pets, ourselves, and our communities. Hunters and trappers who harvest foxes and other carnivores should be vaccinated against rabies and have rabies checks every 2 years. Rabies can be fatal for humans.

It is also important to have your dog vaccinated for rabies every year to protect them from infection, and to protect you and your family from rabies.

Other things you can do to prevent rabies infection:

* Keep your dogs indoors at night, if possible.
* Do not go near unfamiliar animals (including someone else’s pet or a stray dog).
* Do not pick up, pet, feed, or handle any wild animals, especially foxes.
* Teach your children to stay away from wild or stray animals and avoid feeding or handling wildlife.
* [Do not touch dead or sick animals](https://www.enr.gov.nt.ca/sites/enr/files/resources/sick_injured_or_orphaned_wildlife_english_web.pdf), and report your observations to your local ENR office.
* Avoid leaving garbage or other wildlife attractants outside or accessible to wildlife in your community.

Report any animals suspected of having rabies to your local Renewable Resource Officer, Bylaw Officer or the RCMP. If an infected animal bites a pet, it is important to report the incident to your local ENR office. Depending on the level of risk, the animal may need to be put down to protect your safety and the safety of others in your community. Rabies is very serious, and we must take every possible precaution to protect everyone’s health and safety.