

Remember!

Trapping foxes near rural communities may reduce fox encounters and thus prevent rabies in foxes and dogs!

Why? Keeping foxes out of communities prevents dogs from encountering foxes and lowers the risk of transmission to people. Low fox densities means fewer chances of rabies transmission to other animals.

Most human rabies vaccinations in Alaska are given after exposure to a dog who may have had contact with a fox, not through trapping.



For more info on rabies in Alaska visit:

www.adfg.alaska.gov

Species > Parasites & Diseases >
List of Diseases & Parasites > Rabies

Hunters are important founders of the modern wildlife conservation movement. They, along with trappers and sport shooters, provided funding for this publication through payment of federal taxes on firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment, and through state hunting license and tag fees.

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RABIES

Facts about rabies and trapping



What is rabies?

Rabies is preventable and is caused by a virus that is usually transmitted through the bite of an infected mammal. The virus slowly moves up nerves from the bite or puncture wound to the brain. Once symptoms appear, it is always fatal. The virus is mainly in the brain, spinal cord, salivary glands and saliva of infected mammals.

Who is at risk?

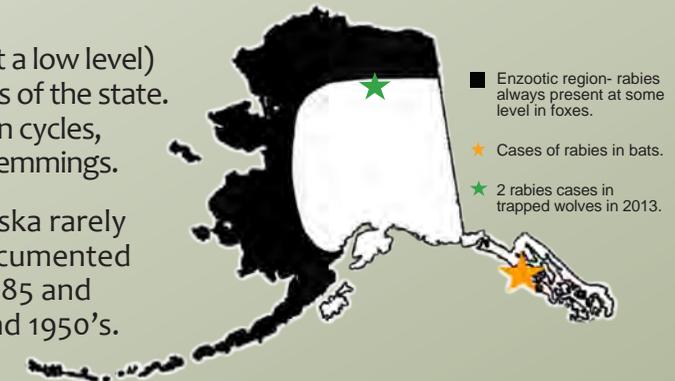
Every year Alaskans, particularly rural residents, receive vaccinations after being attacked by a fox or after exposure to a dog who may have had contact with a rabid fox. Although many individuals may have been exposed to rabies, because of a **quick response and treatment**, there have been no recent rabies related deaths in Alaska.

Trappers are at slightly higher risk to contracting rabies due to increased contact with furbearers. If trappers cut themselves while skinning carcasses, they may be unaware of exposure to rabies and may not receive critical post-exposure treatments. Continue reading to learn more about **minimizing the risk** of rabies by practicing good hygiene. Despite increased exposure risk for trappers, in recent times no trappers or hunters in Alaska have contracted rabies.

Where does rabies occur?

In Alaska, rabies is enzootic (always present at a low level) in arctic foxes along the north and west coasts of the state. Outbreaks occur in both red and arctic foxes in cycles, typically several winters following a boom in lemmings.

Rabies testing on wildlife from Interior Alaska rarely takes place. However, there have been documented cases of rabies in Interior Alaska in 2013, 1985 and rabies outbreaks in red fox in the 1940's and 1950's.



Which species contract rabies?

Any mammal can carry or contract rabies, but the furbearers diagnosed with rabies in Alaska are red and arctic foxes, wolves, wolverines, and river otters. In a survey of trapped carcasses from the enzootic region, 3% of red foxes, 5% of arctic foxes, but less than 1% of wolves were tested positive for the rabies virus. ADF&G also detected the only case of rabies in a wolverine reported in North America.



Alaska Department of Fish & Game
Division of Wildlife Conservation



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How is rabies usually contracted?

In Alaska, the most common rabies exposure that humans face is through unvaccinated dogs who were possibly exposed to rabid foxes or an unidentified dog or fox. This can be prevented by keeping pets rabies vaccinations up to date and preventing dogs from having contact with wildlife, including carcasses.

Trapping may help reduce rabies!

Although trappers are at a slightly higher risk of unrecognized exposure to rabies, rural communities can benefit by trapping. Keeping fox and wolf numbers down can decrease population numbers and in doing so may reduce the risk of exposure for people and dogs!

Protect yourself while hunting/trapping!

The rabies virus is concentrated in the **brain, spinal cord, salivary glands and saliva**. Contact with these to broken skin such as a wound or mouth/eyes/nose can put you at risk of getting rabies.

Follow these recommendations to reduce your risk of an unrecognized rabies exposure.

While Hunting/trapping:

- Avoid head shots on furbearers. Shooting rabid animals in the head can spread the virus and make lab testing for rabies difficult if there is an exposure.

While skinning/handling wildlife:

- Use non-porous gloves when handling trapped animals.
- Wash knives with soap and water immediately after severing the head and between carcasses.
- Do not eat, drink, or smoke while skinning/handling wildlife.

Soap and water reduces the chance of contracting rabies!

If you cut yourself while handling a trapped animal, immediately wash with soap and water, and contact a health care provider! Circumstances will determine if additional treatment is necessary.

Even if you don't cut yourself, wash your hands after handling carcasses. **Thorough washing is the most important step to reduce the chance of becoming infected with rabies!**



Top: rabid arctic fox found dead near Deadhorse, Alaska.

Bottom: rabid red fox demonstrating typical aggressive behavior with no fear of humans.

Proper disposal of animal carcasses!

Proper disposal of animal carcasses is important for reducing the spread of rabies to more areas. Carcasses from northern and western regions that are transported to Interior Alaska or Southcentral can spread rabies to wildlife (a dog in Fairbanks was infected this way in 1985).

To prevent the spread of rabies, dispose of carcasses properly. Do not leave carcasses in the field or open dumps. Also avoid feeding uncooked fox, wolf, or wolverine carcasses to dogs or leaving available to scavengers!

Practice these disposal guidelines:

- Deeply bury carcasses in the trapping area.
- Burn carcasses.
- Dispose of carcasses in a landfill where dogs and wildlife are prevented access.
- Bag until completely rotted in a barrel to prevent scavenging.



Typical rabies signs in furbearers:

- Biting/attacking inanimate or moving objects (tires or snowmachines)
- Little to no fear of people
- Unaware of surroundings
- Appearing blind
- Poor coordination/wobbly or shaky movements
- Aggression
- Weak
- Lameness/paralysis
- Difficulty breathing or swallowing
- Seizures
- Hyper salivation (rare)
- Found dead apparently hit by a vehicle



"Foaming at the mouth" is not typical in rabid wildlife

Report sick wildlife!

If you are attacked and have to kill wildlife, you are required by regulation to report the incident to the State Troopers or your nearest ADF&G office.

Please also report wildlife suspected of having rabies or found dead without explanation to the nearest ADF&G office and email dfg.dwc.vet@alaska.gov or call 907.328.8354.