

RABIES



WHAT IS IT?

Rabies is a disease of viral origin that affects both wild and domestic animals. In developing countries, where it is transmitted mainly by rabid stray dogs, rabies is still considered a major public health concern and continues to cause 55,000 human deaths each year. (24)

SYMPTOMS

- Following infection, the virus replicates within muscle cells surrounding the wound. It then reaches the central nervous system and eventually spreads through the entire body. The mean incubation period is 2 to 3 months, but may range from several days to years.
- The first signs of the disease include pain or an abnormal sensation at or around the wound, followed by other non-specific symptoms such as fever, anorexia, nausea, vomiting, headaches, malaise, and lethargy.
- In the acute stage, rabies symptoms mimic encephalitis. The disease may evolve as one of two clinical forms: furious rabies or paralytic (dumb) rabies. In both cases, the outcome is coma followed by death within a few days.

EPIDEMIOLOGY AND VACCINATION

- Rabies is usually transmitted through a rabid animal's saliva by a bite, scratch, or licking of damaged skin or mucosa.
- To date, vaccination remains the only effective treatment against rabies and acts by neutralizing the virus before it actually reaches the central nervous system. Indeed, once the nervous system is infected, the outcome of the disease is inevitably fatal.

References :

24 - Rabies ; WHO Fact Sheet N°99 revised September 2006:
<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs099/en/>