Rabies Control

Memphis and Shelby County Health Department

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Do dogs and cats have to be vaccinated?

The purpose of this program is to prevent the spread of rabies in the domestic pet population and to humans. By law, pet owners are required to have their pets vaccinated annually for rabies by a licensed veterinarian.
The Memphis and Shelby County Health Department's Rabies Control Program mission is to enforce all Tennessee State Laws and County Ordinances regulating dogs and cats in the unincorporated areas of Shelby County.

Is a license required for dogs or cats?

Owners of dogs residing in Memphis and Shelby County are required by ***County Ordinance 82-3-34 and Tennessee State Law, T.C.A. 68-8-104***, to have their dog licensed yearly and must present proof of rabies vaccine at the time of issuance.
Cats are not required to have a license, with the exceptions of residents in Collierville and Germantown. Each of these municipalities has City Ordinances that require cat licensure in addition to the vaccination.
Failure to license and vaccinate your dog or cat could result in you being issued a citation to appear in General Sessions Court, and result in fines.

What if a dog or other pet bites me?

Although rabies in the domestic pet population is not frequent, the disease is fatal and anyone who is bitten should seek medical attention immediately. All animal bites are to be reported to the Epidemiology Section of the Health Department for medical investigation and follow-up.

According to ***Tennessee State Law, T.C.A. 68-8-111***,and ***Shelby County Ordinance 82-3-46,*** any dog biting a human, whether vaccinated or not, but be held in quarantine for 10 days by a licensed veterinarian or at the Memphis Animal Shelter for Observation

Failure to quarantine your pet if it bites someone could result in you being issued a citation to appear in General Sessions Court for harboring an animal suspected of having rabies. This also could result in a fine. If Possible trap the wild animal that has bitten yourself or your pet.

What should I do if bitten by a wild animal?

Take care of the wound. Hold small bites under warm running water to help them bleed. If the bite or scratch is minor, wash with soap and water for at least 5 minutes. Treat the bite with an antiseptic and cover with a sterile bandage. Call a doctor if the bite is serious. If bite is spurting blood apply direct pressure to the bite area to slow the bleeding and seek emergency help. Emergency treatment is needed for serious or multiple bites. Get tetanus shot within 24 hours, if your last shot was more than 5 years ago.

Report the bite to the proper authority as soon as possible.

All bites are to be reported to the Epidemiology Section of the Health Department for Medical investigation and follow-up. Anyone who has been bitten by an animal should immediately seek medical attention.

What about if my pet is attacked by a wild animal?

Wild animals such as raccoons, foxes, skunks, and bats are the biggest carriers of the virus. Anyone who has been bitten by an animal should immediately seek medical attention. In Shelby County, we have at least two bats testing positive for the rabies virus each year. If you have a pet that has been attacked by one of the above animals, you should immediately report it to the local health department and have the animal examined by a veterinarian.

Do bats get rabies?

Yes they can. Bats are susceptible to rabies, but most do not have the disease. You cannot tell if a bat has rabies just by looking at it; rabies can be confirmed only by having the animal tested in a laboratory. To minimize the risk for rabies, it is best never to handle any bat.

Are animal bites considered reportable to health officials?

If bitten by any animal wild or domestic, seek immediate medical attention and report the incident to the nearest animal control agency or law enforcement agency. However, rabies is uncommon in dogs, cats, and ferrets in the United States. Very few bites by these animals carry a risk of rabies. If the cat (or dog or ferret) appeared healthy at the time you were bitten, it can be confined by its owner for 10 days and observed. No anti-rabies prophylaxis is needed.

Physicians are required to report all animal bite cases to the health department.

Helpful Hints

- Never handle stray or injured animals,
- Report the location and type of stray or injured animal to the nearest animal control agency or law enforcement agency.
- Keep all pets confined to your property, do not allow them to run at large.
- Have your pet examined by a licensed veterinarian on an annual basis.
- Report all lost or missing pets to the nearest animal control agency or law enforcement agency and give a full description of your pet.
- Spay or neuter your pet to help control pet over population.

Animal Control Agencies in Memphis and Shelby County

Memphis Animal Shelter	901-636-1416
Bartlett Public Works	901-385-5555
Collierville Public Works	901-457-2670
Germantown Animal Shelter	901-757-7358
Shelby County Rabies	901-222-9715

After 4:30 p.m., and on weekends,
contact the Shelby County Sheriff Dept. at 379-7625.

What role does the health department play to help protect my family?

What We Do To Help Protect You and Your Family!

- Investigate nearly 100 animal bites in the unincorporated areas of Shelby County each year. Our office investigates all reported suspect animal bites and scratches and the animal is placed under quarantine for observation for 10 days following the exposure. The animal is observed at the end of the quarantine period to be sure that it is healthy.
- In the unincorporated areas of Shelby County there are approximately 2,400 animal complaints investigated during the year.
- Pick up approximately 1,700 stray and unwanted animals in the unincorporated areas of Shelby County annually.
- Conduct close to 4,500 door-to-door inspections checking for unlicensed and unvaccinated dogs and cats.
- Throughout the year we transport approximately 150 specimens to the State Lab in Jackson, Tennessee to be tested for rabies.
- The Department works very closely with the Memphis Animal Shelter and the Memphis and Shelby County Veterinary Medical Association to insure the proper license and vaccination of over 120,000 animals annually.

- Rabies Control Officer coordinates an annual rabies drive in conjunction with the Memphis Animal Shelter and the Memphis and Shelby County Veterinary Medical Association on the last two Saturdays in the month of April to license and vaccinate dogs and cats for rabies.
- Handles approximately 100 court cases annually for violators of the state laws and county ordinances in the unincorporated areas of Shelby County.
- Assist the Shelby County Sheriff's Department Drug Enforcement Section in handling of dogs during drug busts in Memphis and Shelby County and also assist in other functions of their operations where appropriate.

Where can I get my pets vaccinated?

There are many licensed veterinarians in the area that are available to provide excellent care for your pets, assuring that all their vaccinations are current.

Annually the Memphis and Shelby County Health Department sponsors special weekend Rabies Vaccination Clinics in conjunction with the Memphis Animal Shelter and the Memphis and Shelby County Veterinary Medical Association during April, Rabies Vaccination Month. The clinics are scheduled the last two Saturdays in April every year. This year the clinics will be held Saturday, April 23, 2005, and Saturday, April 30, 2005, 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., at 19 locations throughout the city and county. For more information regarding the clinic locations contact the Rabies Control Program at (901) 222-9715.

All dogs and cats three months old and up must have a current rabies vaccination.

For more information contact the Epidemiology Section of the Memphis and Shelby County Health Department at (901) 222-9243 or the Rabies Control Officer at (901) 222-9715. Office Hours are Monday - Friday, from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.