

Rabies virus exposures

Rabies key facts

- Rabies is a disease of the nervous system caused by the rabies virus.
- Rabies is almost always fatal once symptoms develop.
- The virus is not found in Australia or New Zealand.
- The virus is currently found in Asia, Africa, North and South America and parts of Europe.
- Pre-exposure vaccination is available.

How is it transmitted?

The rabies virus is carried by domestic and wild mammals.

The virus is transmitted to humans when infected saliva enters the body, usually via a bite or scratch but also by licks to the eyes, nose or mouth or on a pre-existing skin break.

Symptoms usually appear in 3–8 weeks but can be between a few days and a few years after exposure.

What's the treatment?

Rabies vaccine given after the exposure but before the onset of any symptoms will prevent disease.

Once symptoms develop there is no specific treatment.

Proper cleaning of the wound reduces the risk of infection: wash with soap and water for at least 5 mins.

Tetanus injection may also be necessary.

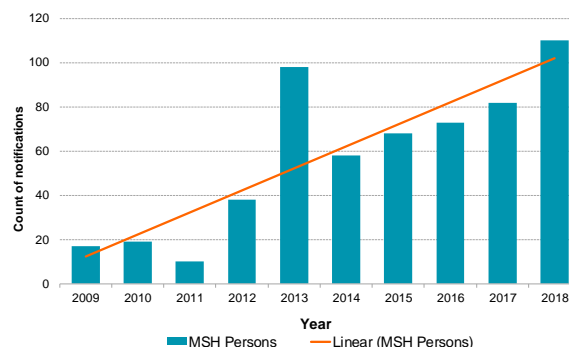
What to do if exposed?

- Clean the wound carefully.
- Seek medical advice about the need for vaccination as soon as possible, even if travelling.
- Speak to your GP or local Public Health Unit when you return to Australia to ensure treatment is complete.

Metro South Health data

An average of 90 potential rabies exposures per year are reported to the Metro South Public Health Unit (around 260 per year in the rest of Queensland)

Almost 40% of these are people aged 20–29 years.



A peak in 2013 followed publicity relating to the third confirmed death from Australian bat lyssavirus (closely related to rabies) in Queensland.

Substantial growth in reported exposures in recent years reflects increased awareness of exposure risk among both the public and medical practitioners and increased travel to south-east Asia.

In 2019, over 70 exposures have been reported by Metro South residents by the end of August.

Main messages

- Reported exposures are increasing.
- **Avoid contact with domestic or wild mammals in countries where rabies occurs.**
- If travelling to a country with rabies, speak to your doctor about vaccination at least 6 weeks prior to departure.
- If exposed, **get vaccinated**, even if vaccinated previously.
- It's never too late — seek vaccination even if exposure was in the past

For further information see: metrosouth.health.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/health-indicators-2018-metro-south-health.pdf

Queensland Health, Rabies fact sheet: conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/media/pdf/14/217/18/rabies-v7