



# DISCUSSION GUIDE ON RABIES



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# 1

## INTRODUCTION

**R**abies is a vaccine-preventable disease caused by a virus and occurs in over 150 countries globally including Ghana. It is responsible for tens of thousands of deaths every year, mainly in Asia and Africa, with 40% of these deaths occurring in children under 15 years of age.

Dogs contribute to 99% of all rabies transmissions to humans. Rabies can be prevented through vaccination of dogs and prevention of dog bites.

A One Health approach assures the engagement of multiple sectors and local communities to create awareness and promote dog vaccination campaigns (WHO). This Discussion Guide on Rabies has been developed to facilitate effective engagement and discussions with community members on rabies and its prevention. It provides a simple step-by-step approach to tackling the relevant topics of concern and sets the stage to systematically address issues bordering on myths, misconceptions, and rumors.

This Discussion Guide was developed by a multisectoral team from the Health Promotion Division of the Ghana Health Service, Veterinary Services Directorate of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, World Health Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization and other One Health Partners.

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### *Information compiled from:*

- CDC Rabies website: <https://www.cdc.gov/rabies/index.html>
- WHO Rabies website: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/rabies>

## 2

## WHAT IS RABIES?

- Rabies is a viral disease of warm-blooded animals which is transmitted through the bite or scratch of an infected animal.
- It is a severe disease that spreads between animals and people.
- Rabies causes severe illness and death among animals and humans.
- Rabies is a vaccine preventable disease.
- In Ghana, rabies is commonly spread to people through a dog bite or scratch.
- In addition to dogs, any animal that has hair can get and spread rabies, including cats, monkeys, bats, and squirrels.
- Not all dogs or animals that bite have rabies.
  - Dogs and other animals are not born with rabies.
  - Dogs and other animals can get and spread rabies at any age.
  - Dogs and other animals can only get rabies from an animal with rabies.
  - Not all stray dogs or wild animals have rabies.

## 3

## HOW IS RABIES SPREAD?

### 3.1 How is rabies spread between animals?

- Rabies is transmitted when an infected animal bites or scratches another animal and the saliva of the infected animal enters a break in the skin (like a wound or cut).

- Rabies can also enter an animal's body through the mouth, eyes, or nose.
  - This can happen when an animal with rabies licks another animal's face or skin.

### **3.2 How is rabies spread between animals and humans?**

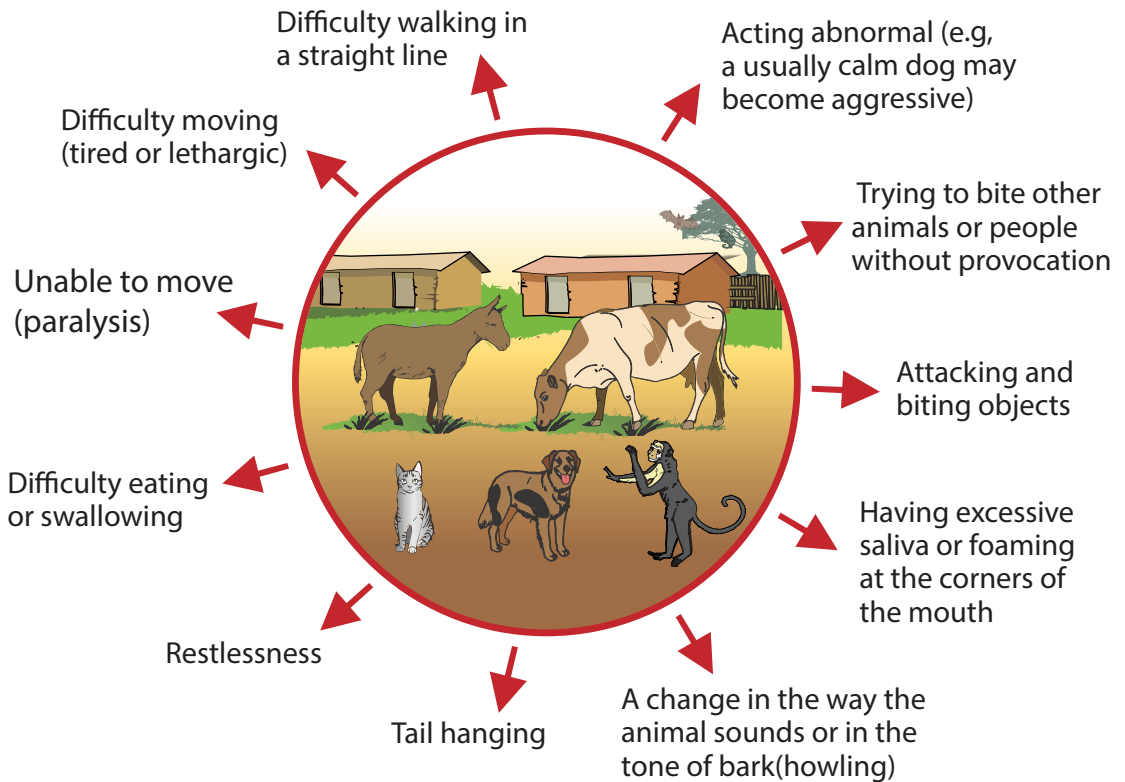
- Rabies is spread from the saliva of an infected warm-blooded animal such as dogs and cats, through bites or scratches.

The rabies virus enters a break in the skin (like a wound or cut) and infects the central nervous system of the animal or person, ultimately causing rabies disease in the brain which can lead to death.
- Rabies can also enter a person's body through the mouth, eyes, or nose.
  - This can happen when an animal with rabies licks a person's face or skin that is broken.
- Any animal that has hair can get and spread rabies, including cats, monkeys, donkeys, rodents, rabbits, cows, and bats.
- There is no evidence to show that rabies spreads from person to person.

## 4

### WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF RABIES IN ANIMALS?

- **The signs and symptoms of rabies in animals include:**





## 5

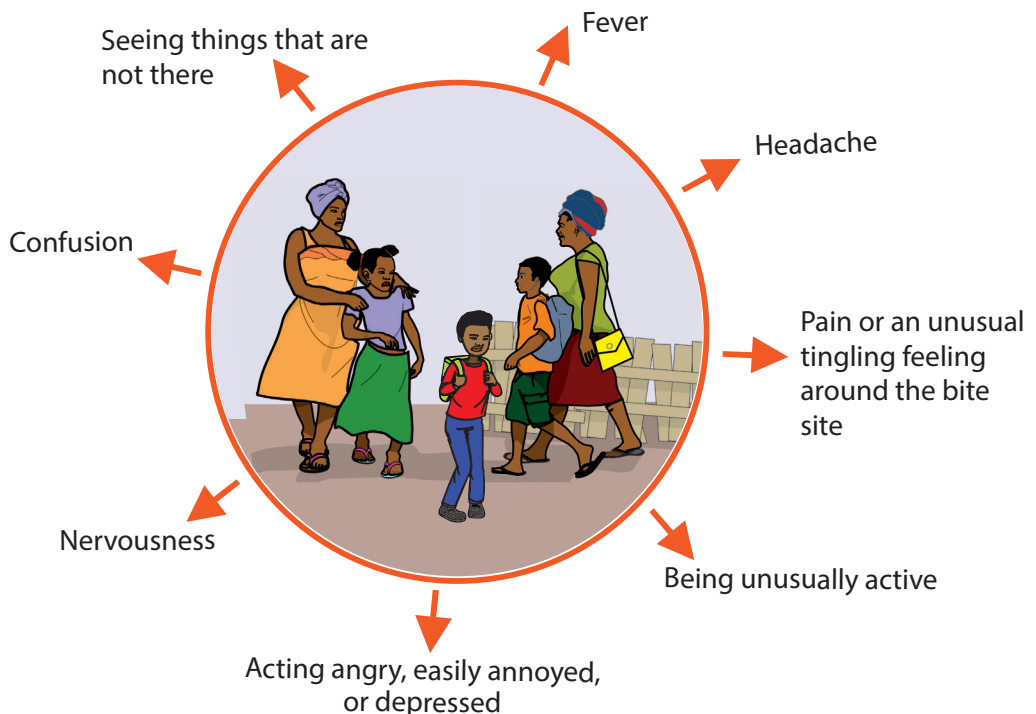
**WHEN WILL AN ANIMAL BEGIN TO SHOW THE SIGNS AND THE SYMPTOMS OF RABIES?**

- When a dog or any other animal is infected with the rabies virus, it may take several months before the onset of the signs and symptoms. Once an animal begins to show the signs and symptoms of rabies, it will die within one to ten days.

## 6

**WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF RABIES IN HUMANS?**

- **The signs and symptoms of rabies in humans include:**



**7****WHEN WILL A PERSON BEGIN TO SHOW SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF RABIES AFTER BEING BITTEN AND SCRATCHED?**

- The length of time from when rabies enters a person's body to when the person starts to show signs and symptoms is usually 2-3 months, but sometimes can vary from one week to one year.
- Depending on the site of the bite, the length of time it takes before the signs and symptoms begin to show are different for each person.
  - The closer the site is to the brain/head, the shorter the time signs and symptoms begin to appear.
- Once the signs and symptoms of rabies begin to show, the person will die within a few days.
  - That is why it is so important to go to the nearest health facility or contact a Community Health Officer/Nurse immediately after an animal bite or scratch for assessment and treatment of the wound.

**8****HOW CAN YOU PREVENT RABIES?**

- Rabies can be prevented by avoiding the bite or scratch of a dog, a cat, or any other animal.

**NO BITE! NO SCRATCH! = NO RABIES**

There are simple measures you can take to keep you from getting infected by the rabies virus.

- Vaccinate your pets such as dogs and cats each year to prevent rabies. Make sure you obtain a valid rabies vaccination certificate.
- When bitten or scratched by a dog, cat or any other animal, immediately wash the part of your body that has been bitten or scratched with soap under running water continuously for 15 minutes or more.
- After washing the part of the body that has been bitten or scratched, go to the nearest health facility, or contact your Community Health Officer/Nurse immediately for advice and treatment.
- Contact the nearest veterinary service centre about the dog or animal involved in the bite or scratch case for veterinary intervention and safe handling of the dog.

## 9

### **WHAT TO DO IF BITTEN OR SCRATCHED BY A DOG, OR ANY OTHER ANIMAL**

- Any dog bite or scratch including those that seem mild and harmless must be treated immediately to prevent infection including rabies and other health complications.
- Immediately wash the part of your body that has been bitten or scratched by a dog or any animal with soap under running water continuously for 15 minutes or more.

- After thoroughly washing the part of the body that was bitten or scratched, to the nearest health facility, or contact your community health nurse immediately for advice and treatment.

**THOROUGH WASHING OF THE WOUND  
WITH SOAP UNDER RUNNING WATER CAN  
PREVENT RABIES AND SAVE A LIFE!**

- The health facility or your Community Health Nurse may vaccinate you to protect you from developing rabies through the prompt administration of post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP). The rabies vaccine is given in a series of five shots over 21 days.
  - The first dose of the vaccine is given the day of the bite or scratch, and then a dose of the vaccine given at day 3, 7, 14 and 21.
  - The PEP prevents you from getting rabies if all the five shots are taken within the 21 days.
- Getting PEP treatment immediately after you are bitten or scratched by a dog or any animal can stop rabies.
  - Once a person starts to show signs and symptoms of rabies, they will die.
- Report the dog bite or scratch case to the nearest Veterinary Service Office for the animal to be quarantined (kept away from other animals and people for 10 days) while it is observed for signs and symptoms of rabies and for assessment.

**10****HOW BIG IS THE PROBLEM OF RABIES?**

- Rabies is 100% fatal with no cure when the signs and symptoms begin to appear.
- Rabies kills people and domestic animals such as dogs and cattle.
- Rabies causes financial hardship when people have to pay for vaccination after bite wounds including the cost of the medical treatment, and cost of travel to the medical facility.
- Children are at a greater risk of getting rabies. This is because children:
  - Play with animals.
  - May not report bites.
  - May receive more severe bites.
  - Are often bitten in the head.
- Some of the world's poorest people are those most at risk of the disease.
- The economic cost incurred through control of rabies among dogs and associated surveillance.

**11****WHO IS AT RISK OF CONTRACTING RABIES?**

- For most people, the risk of contracting rabies is relatively low. However, there are certain situations that may put a person at a higher risk.

These include:

- o Living and working in an area populated by dogs, bats, cats, and monkeys.
- o Living in a rural area where there is greater exposure to dogs and other wild animals, and little or no access to vaccines and preventive therapy.

## 12

### **HOW CAN YOU PROTECT YOURSELF, YOUR FAMILY, AND YOUR ANIMALS FROM RABIES?**

- Vaccinate your dogs against rabies every year.
- Vaccinating your dogs, protects them from rabies, and protects you, your family, and other animals from getting rabies from them.

**THE VACCINATED DOG  
IS THE SOLDIER IN THE  
FIGHT AGAINST RABIES**

- Rabies vaccine for dogs is available at Government Veterinary Service offices and Private Veterinary Service providers' facilities.

- Contact a Veterinary Officer, Community Animal Health Worker, Agriculture Extension Officer, or Community Health Nurse to direct you to recognized veterinary service centre to vaccinate your dog.
  - It is possible for an animal with rabies to spread the disease to another animal or person before the animal shows signs and symptoms.
- Keep your dogs in the yard or in a closed area.
  - Dogs that roam freely are more likely to meet rabid dogs and other animals and can spread the disease to other dogs/animals, your family, or in your community.
- Feed your dog regularly to avoid having them roam for food.
- Take your dogs for regular veterinary visit.
- Avoid letting your pet or any animal lick your face or any breaks in the skin such as cuts, scratches, or sores.
  - Rabies is spread through the saliva of an animal, and the signs of diseases are not always easy to see.
- Always wash your hands and arms with soap under running water immediately after any contact with an animal, even if it looks healthy, because you cannot always see the signs and symptoms of diseases.

**13****WHAT SHOULD YOU DO TO AVOID  
DOG BITE OR SCRATCHES?**

- Dogs and other animals may bite for many reasons.
  - For example, they may bite because they feel afraid or are trying to protect something that is theirs, where they live, their young ones, their food, or their owner.
- Avoid disturbing dogs or any other animal, especially when they are sleeping, eating, or with their young ones.
  - Dogs may bite when they are surprised, or afraid.
- Take your time when passing or entering a place where a dog lives.
  - Many people keep dogs to protect themselves and their home.
  - Taking your time when passing or entering an area where a dog lives can help a dog know you are not a threat.
- Avoid playing, touching, or getting close to stray dogs and animals that you do not know, even if they look friendly.
- If a dog comes close to you, stand still and remain quiet.
- Stay away from any dog and other animals that is acting strangely or that looks sick.
  - A dog that is acting strange or looks sick might have rabies or some other sickness that makes it feel sick and more likely to bite if you go near it.



- Any animal that has bitten someone or another animal should be examined by a Veterinary Officer and kept away from other animals and people for 10 days while it is observed for the signs and symptoms of rabies.
- If a dog or an animal shows signs and symptoms of rabies or is acting strangely, avoid the animal and contact a Veterinary Officer, Community Animal Health Worker, Agriculture Extension Officer, or Community Health Nurse immediately for advice and guidance on what to do next.
- Let your family and neighbours know if you see any strange behaviour in dogs, so that they take care.
- If you find any bites on your animals or they are showing any strange behaviour, separate them from other animals and people. Immediately inform a Veterinary Officer, Community Animal Health Worker, or Agriculture Extension Officer for advice.

## 11

### CAN RABIES BE TREATED?

- There is no treatment for rabies once a person develops rabies and the signs and symptoms begin to show.
  - It's rare for the disease to be cured.
  - Death will occur once the signs and symptoms begin to appear.

**15****HOW TO HANDLE AND DISPOSE OF DEAD ANIMALS SAFELY?**

- If a dog or another animal dies, avoid the animal, and contact a Veterinary Officer, Community Animal Health Worker, Agriculture Extension Officer, or Environmental Health and Sanitation Officer to help safely dispose of the dead animal and to submit the animal for testing.
- Do not touch the body, faeces, or body fluids of a dead animal with your bare hands. Wear rubber gloves to prevent the spread of diseases.
- If a Veterinary Officer, Community Animal Health Worker, the Agriculture Extension Officer does not respond in one day to advise on how to dispose of a dead animal safely, it is important to dispose of the animal very carefully.
  - Even if the animal looks healthy, it is important to take safety precautions because you cannot always see the signs and symptoms of the disease.
- There are six key steps to handling and disposing of a sick or dead animal safely if you are unable to get help or guidance from a Veterinary Officer, Community Animal Health Worker, Agriculture Extension Officer, or Environmental Health and Sanitation Officer.

## DO NOT TOUCH THE ANIMAL WITH YOUR BARE HANDS

- o **Step 1:** Wear rubber gloves or plastic bags to protect your hands and cover your eyes with glasses and your nose and mouth with a mask or cloth.
- o **Step 2:** Use a shovel, wheelbarrow, or other tools to move the dead animal to where you can burn or bury it deeply in the soil when possible.
- o **Step 3:** If plastic bags or gloves are used, wash them with soap under running water while they are still on your hands. This is very important. Removing dirty gloves or bags is one of the main ways diseases can spread, so it is important you wash them after each step before you finally take them off.
- o **Step 4:** Pour soapy water or disinfectant over the shovel, wheelbarrow, or other tools used to move the dead animal and place the tools in the sun to dry. Then wash your hands and arms with the gloves or bags still on them immediately with soap under running water.

- o **Step 5:** Remove the glasses and mask or cloth from your face and wash them immediately with soap under running water and place them in the sun to dry.
- o **Step 6:** Wash the gloves or bags well once more with soap under running water and remove them carefully. Burn or deeply bury the plastic bags along with the dead animal in the soil far from where water is collected, and household activities take place, and then wash your hands and arms immediately with soap under running water.



All dogs are at risk if they are not vaccinated.

**Vaccinate your dog now!**



**SCAN ME**



Republic of Ghana



Ghana Health Service

