What should I do if my pet is bitten or scratched by an animal?

If your pet is bitten or scratched by an animal, avoid contact with the wound and contact a veterinarian immediately. Local and state laws will dictate what to do for your pets. Each jurisdiction has different requirements based on your pet's vaccination status, exposure, or potential exposure to rabies. Your local veterinarian is the most knowledgeable person that can provide the current rabies post-exposure requirements.

What are the symptoms of rabies in humans?

It is important to seek treatment from a medical provider immediately after any animal bite or scratch, even if no symptoms are present. Early symptoms of rabies may be similar to those of the flu and include weakness, discomfort, fever, or headache. Other symptoms include irritability and itching or pain at the exposure site. It is important to note that by the time any symptoms appear, rabies often cannot be successfully treated.

References:
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/
World Health Organization (WHO) http://www.who.int/topics/rabies/en/

Always keep your pet's rabies vaccine up-to-date!
Your Veterinary Treatment Facility can help!
Always keep your pet’s rabies vaccine up-to-date according to state and local laws. Also, report the presence of strange behaving animals, animals wandering or unattended in your neighborhood, or wildlife loose in the area to the proper authorities. Do not approach, feed, or handle wild or stray animals or any animal that you do not know.

How can I tell if an animal has rabies?
It is not always possible to tell if an animal has rabies. Not all animals infected with rabies appear sick or display abnormal behavior. Contact a medical provider right away if you or your pet are bitten or scratched by any wild or stray animal or any animal you do not know.

While not all animals present the same symptoms of rabies, most will demonstrate one of two sets of symptoms:

1. Furious rabies. Symptoms include restlessness, wandering, howling, drooling, and attacks on other animals, people, or inanimate objects. Affected animals often swallow foreign objects such as sticks and stones. Wild animals frequently lose their fear of humans and may attack humans or animals they would normally avoid. Nocturnal animals (e.g., foxes, raccoons, skunks, bats) may be out during the day. Death usually occurs 4 to 8 days after symptoms appear.

2. Paralytic or “dumb” rabies. Symptoms include slow, progressive paralysis. The throat and jaw/facial muscles become paralyzed, and the animal is unable to swallow or bite. The animal will usually salivate profusely. Laryngeal paralysis can cause changes in vocalization, which may include abnormal bellowing in cattle or a hoarse howling in dogs. Biting is uncommon. Death usually occurs within 2 to 6 days as the result of respiratory failure.