How can I prevent rabies?

You can prevent rabies by vaccinating your pet dog or cat against rabies as recommended by the veterinarian.

By doing so you are protecting not only yourself and your family but also your community.

Also, do not sell or consume milk or meat from rabid or suspected cows or buffaloes.

You could also consider vaccinating your children against rabies for added protection.

Human rabies is 100% fatal but easily preventable through timely vaccination.

What is rabies?

Rabies is a potentially fatal but preventable viral disease that is primarily transmitted to humans by dogs. The rabies virus infects animals such as dogs, cats, mongooses, jackals and foxes.

Some facts about rabies

- The rabies virus travels from the site of the bite to the brain through nerves at the rate of about a centimeter a day.
- The rabies virus is not present in the blood of the patient.
- Fear of water (hydrophobia) is a typical symptom which is only observed in humans.
How can I get rabies?

You can get rabies through the bite or scratch of rabid animals. Transmission also occurs when saliva from rabid animals comes into direct contact with fresh cuts or wounds.

Corneal transplantation with the cornea donated by a patient with rabies encephalitis, is another source of human infection.

Rabies is not transmitted through consumption of boiled milk or cooked meat.

Which animals can I get rabies from?

Dogs, cats and wild animals such as jackals, wolves, foxes and mongooses are common sources of rabies.

How can I recognize a rabid animal?

Rabid animals:
- Are aggressive and bite without provocation.
- Have a tendency to eat sticks, paper etc.
- Have a tendency to run for no apparent reason.
- Bark and growl hoarsely.
- Salivate or foam excessively at the mouth.

Who is at risk of getting rabies?

Everybody is at risk of getting rabies, irrespective of age, gender or socioeconomic status, but the following groups are more vulnerable:
- Children below the age of 5.
- Dog-catchers and handlers.
- Forest guards.

What are the signs and symptoms of rabies in humans?

The clinical symptoms appear in phases:
- Initially, pain or a tingling sensation at the site of infection.
- Fear of water (hydrophobia).
- Restlessness.
- Excessive salivation.
- Convulsion.
- Finally, death.

How can I prevent rabies when bitten by a dog?

If bitten by a dog, consult a doctor immediately.

If bitten in the head, neck or finger tips, it is a medical emergency!

Immediately flush and wash the wound for a minimum of five minutes with soap and water and apply antiseptics.

Consult a medical doctor for rabies prophylaxis:
- Take the full course of vaccination. This usually requires visiting the health facility as recommended.
- Do not consume alcohol or take chloroquine during the vaccination period.

Rabies vaccination is a must if the dog that bit you is potentially rabid i.e. the dog:
- Dies within ten days of observation.
- Is killed by someone (so you don't know whether it is rabid or not).
- Disappears during the observation period.
- Cannot be recognized at the time of exposure.