

Rabies in Switzerland: a daily battle

Rabies is fatal for both humans and animals and causes an estimated [59,000 human deaths](#) each year, mostly in children in developing countries. Around 99 percent of human cases are due to bites by infected dogs. Switzerland has made major efforts to combat this disease and with great success, as it has been officially rabies-free since 1999. Maintaining this status is a daily challenge.

What is the risk to Switzerland?

Any dog, cat or ferret that is brought into Switzerland from a [rabies risk country](#) without sufficient immune protection and that does not comply with the [EU-PETS](#) (European Pet Travel Scheme) poses a risk to human and animal health. An imported case of rabies requires extensive investigations in order to identify any humans or animals who had contact with the infected animal. Exposed humans have to undergo post-exposure vaccination and contact animals have to be euthanized. The import of dogs, cats and ferrets must therefore be strictly controlled.

Prompt action is vital

Rabies is a disease of the central nervous system and is almost always fatal in both humans and animals. The incubation period before the first symptoms appear can range from a week to several months (typically one to three months in humans). A reliable diagnosis can only be made in brain tissue, so any animals suspected to have rabies must be euthanized. If a case of rabies is suspected, prompt action is vital to protect potentially exposed humans against this deadly zoonosis.

Get informed before travelling

Make sure you are well-informed before travelling: the [FSVO's online tool](#) has plenty of information and tips to help you and your pet return to Switzerland without any problems. When visiting a rabies risk country, avoid touching the local animals and never bring an animal home with you, as it might already be infected and pass the disease on to you.

Surveillance by the Swiss Rabies Centre

In 2020 the Swiss Rabies Centre at the Institute of Virology and Immunology (IVI) examined [118 samples](#), including 110 animal brains, under the Swiss rabies surveillance programme, all of which tested negative. The Swiss Rabies Centre is responsible for rabies diagnosis in humans and animals, as well as for serology testing of rabies vaccine efficacy in human and veterinary medicine.