

Rabies Quick-Reference Guide for Veterinary Practices

Provided by the Bureau of Animal Health and Diagnostic Services, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture

General

- Rabies in humans is a preventable disease if exposure is recognized and prophylaxis is begun in a timely manner.
- Exposure to rabies may be by a mucous membrane (eye, nose, mouth) contacting saliva from a rabid animal, by a break in the skin or an open wound contacting saliva from a rabid animal, or by a bite wound from a rabid animal.
- If there is any concern of human exposure to rabies, err on the side of safety. Test every animal that is euthanized when rabies is



a potential differential diagnosis and there has been possible human exposure.

- Bats continue to be the number one cause of human rabies cases. The Centers for Disease Control now recommends that every bat found inside a building or home be tested for rabies if there was possible human contact.

Human Exposure

- If there has been human exposure and the domestic animal is suspected of having rabies:
 1. Immediately euthanize and submit specimen for testing.
 2. Notify the county Department of Health office.
 3. Notify the regional Department of Agriculture office.
- If there has been human exposure but the domestic animal is not suspected of having rabies:
 1. Regardless of the vaccination status, it must be quarantined for a 10-day period.
 2. Notify the county Department of Health office.
 3. Notify the regional Department of Agriculture office.
 4. Do not vaccinate the animal until the ten-day period has elapsed.
 5. If the animal is euthanized or dies within the 10-day period, it must be tested for rabies.
- If there has been human exposure caused by a wild animal:
 1. Regardless of whether the wild animal is suspected of having rabies, it must be immediately euthanized and submitted for rabies testing.

2. Notify the county Department of Health office.
 3. Notify the PA Game Commission.
- If there has been human exposure but the animal is not available for observation or testing:
 1. Notify the county Department of Health office.

Domestic Animal Exposure

- If a currently vaccinated animal is suspected of being exposed to rabies:



1. Notify the regional Department of Agriculture office.
 2. A 90-day quarantine is imposed by the Department of Agriculture.
 3. Post-exposure prophylaxis is an option.
- If an expired vaccine is suspected of being exposed to rabies:
 1. Notify the regional Department of Agriculture office.
 2. A 180-day quarantine is imposed by the Department of Agriculture.
 3. Post-exposure prophylaxis is an option.
 - If an unvaccinated animal is suspected of being exposed to rabies:
 1. Notify the regional Department of Agriculture office.
 2. Euthanasia is strongly recommended by the Department of Agriculture.
 3. A 180-day quarantine is imposed if the animal is not euthanized.
 4. Post-exposure prophylaxis is an option.
 - If a domestic animal is found with bite wounds of unknown origin:
 1. Notify the regional Department of Agriculture office.
 2. Assume exposure to rabies has occurred.

Wildlife Incidents

- The PA Game Commission has primary responsibility for euthanizing and submitting wildlife for testing in cases of potential human or domestic animal exposure to rabies.
- Veterinarians may euthanize and submit wildlife for testing in cases of potential human or domestic animal exposure to rabies. ■