

Bites

Dog, cat or ferret exposed to a wild/exotic mammal or bat

Reporting: Dogs, cats and ferrets bitten or suspected to have been bitten by wild carnivores or bats should be reported to the [local health department](#) (LHD) because of the rabies risk. The bitten animal will need to be quarantined unless the wild carnivore or bat that caused the potential exposure can be tested. Reporting is particularly important if the dog, cat or ferret is not current on its rabies vaccination, as that animal may develop rabies up to six months after exposure, putting the owners at risk. Veterinarians do not have independent authority to quarantine an animal or require an owner to euthanize and test an animal. This is the responsibility of the LHD.

Transmission: A rabies exposure includes any break in the skin by the teeth of a mammal, where saliva may have entered an open wound or mucous membrane. Scratches without saliva contact are not considered an exposure. Any dog, cat or ferret that is suspected to have fought with or had a wild/exotic mammal or bat in its mouth should be considered exposed to rabies. The virus is not transmitted through blood, urine or skunk spray.

Diagnostics:

- Laboratory: There is no test for animals that can determine whether that animal was exposed or is incubating rabies
- DFA: Fresh brain tissue from the biting animal will be positive if the animal was shedding virus.

Sample Submission:

- ODHL is the only lab in Ohio that performs DFA testing. The Rabies Test Submission Report form is available at: <http://www.odh.ohio.gov/pdf/forms/hea2539.pdf>
- Live animals are not accepted. Small animals such as bats and rodents can be submitted whole, while only the head of animals such as cats and dogs should be submitted.
- Place the specimen in a watertight bag, keep the sample refrigerated or packed with ice, but do not freeze. For shipping procedures, contact your LHD.

Animal Management: Dogs, cats or ferrets that are not current on their rabies vaccination should be either euthanized or quarantined for six months. The level of quarantine will vary with the situation and shall be determined by the LHD. They can be vaccinated immediately when the quarantine is ordered or one month prior to release. Currently vaccinated dogs, cats or ferrets should receive an immediate booster and be observed for 45 days. If the dog, cat or ferret becomes ill during the quarantine, the LHD should be notified and the animal evaluated by a veterinarian.

Because of the long incubation period before a potentially exposed dog, cat or ferret becomes infectious; the animal is not an immediate risk of transmitting rabies to a person or other animal. Similarly, if a potentially exposed animal is euthanized soon after the exposure there is no need to test that animal since it will be negative.

Personal protection: The rabies virus is very fragile in the environment and mechanical transmission has never been documented. Therefore, the risk of rabies transmission to a person who immediately handled a dog, cat or ferret that had contact with a rabies suspect wild animal is very low. Promptly washing the pet with any soap or detergent is sufficient to kill any virus on the animal, although sunlight and drying would do the same.

If a rabies suspect must be dispatched without benefit of conventional euthanasia, every effort should be made to prevent damage to the brain. If the animal must be shot, do not damage the head and the shooter should protect against unintended splatter. Dead animals should be handled as if they were a rabid animal: using gloves or a shovel, double bagging the carcass plus storing and shipping at a refrigerated temperature.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

[NASPHV Rabies Compendium](#)

[ODH Rabies Web Page](#)

[Rabies: Information for Health Care Professionals, CDC](#)