

**MANAGEMENT OF DOMESTIC ANIMAL RABIES EXPOSURES**  
**NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH - APPENDIX III**

December 2014

**AUTHORITY:** New Jersey law requires that whenever a dog, cat, or other animal has been known or suspected to have been bitten by an animal known or suspected to be affected by rabies, the owner of the animal or any person with knowledge of the incident shall notify the local health department with jurisdiction where the animal is located (N.J.S.A 26:4-78). The Health Officer shall then serve notice on the owner of the animal requiring euthanasia or confinement for up to 6 months and observation for the emergence of clinical signs of rabies (N.J.S.A 26:4-83).

**DEFINITIONS:**

**Known rabid animal:** Any animal confirmed rabid through laboratory testing

**Suspect rabid animal:**

- Any bat, raccoon, skunk, fox, or groundhog, unless found negative for rabies through laboratory testing
- Other wildlife and domestic animals showing clinical signs of rabies (abnormal behavior with neurologic impairment), unless found negative for rabies through laboratory testing
- Any animal submitted for rabies laboratory testing but is deemed unsatisfactory for testing by laboratory staff

Note: fights between dogs and cats are not usually considered rabies exposures unless one of the animals was also displaying clinical signs of rabies or is found positive through laboratory testing.

Domestic animal rabies exposures are defined as follows:

**Exposure Category 1:** Visible bite wound or wounds known to have been sustained from a known or suspect rabid animal.

**Exposure Category 2:** Situations in which saliva or central nervous tissue from a known or suspect rabid animal is likely to have had direct contact with mucous membranes (eyes) or a break in the skin of the animal. An example of this would be a dog fighting face to face with a raccoon or having a raccoon in its mouth.

**Exposure Category 3:** Wounds of unknown origin suspected by a veterinarian to be bite wounds.

**Exposure Category 4:** Situations when an animal may have been near a known or suspect rabid animal but direct contact was not witnessed. Examples of this include an owner finds a dead raccoon in the yard where dogs are kept or a bat is found in a room with a cat. If the suspect rabid animal is tested and found to be negative for rabies, the potentially exposed animal would not need to be confined and observed.

**NOTE:** Veterinarians, veterinary technicians, and animal control officers should always wear gloves and eye protection when handling animals recently (i.e., within two hours) attacked by a known or suspect rabid animal to prevent exposure to saliva from the attacking animal that may be present on the attacked animal's fur. After handling, hands should be thoroughly washed with soap and water and all surfaces in contact with the animal thoroughly disinfected.

**I. ANIMAL CONFINEMENT GUIDELINES - EXPOSURE CATEGORIES 1 or 2:**

**A. If the animal is currently vaccinated against rabies (i.e., the duration of immunity from the last vaccination has not expired):**

1. Report to the local health department.
2. Administer rabies booster vaccination immediately.  
**Note:** Animals that have received a booster rabies vaccine due to exposure as required in A. 2. (above), would not need an additional booster if exposed again within 8 weeks.
3. Confine and observe animal for **45 days**. The animal shall be kept inside a building or pen or on a leash under the immediate control of an adult. The local health department should issue an official confinement notice to the owner of the animal.

**B. If the animal has never been vaccinated against rabies (including when reports of past vaccination cannot be verified):**

1. **Euthanasia is strongly recommended.** If the exposed animal has bitten a human within 10 days of the date of euthanasia, a specimen should be submitted for rabies testing.
2. Report to the local Health Officer if the owner chooses not to euthanize the animal.
3. The local health department shall order the animal to be **confined and observed for six months in strict isolation** (i.e., no human contact) in a kennel or cage in a veterinary hospital, animal control facility or commercial boarding establishment, or escape-proof pen at the owner's home. The local health department shall approve confinement facilities and perform unannounced inspections to ensure compliance.

4. It is recommended that exposed animals be confined between the time of the exposure and final disposition of the animal, which should be made within 10 days of the exposure. If more than 10 days is required to strictly isolate the exposed animal, it should be housed in a secure animal control or veterinary facility.
5. The exposed animal should be vaccinated against rabies one month prior to release from confinement.

**C. If the animal has been previously vaccinated but the duration of immunity has expired:**

Local Health Officers may impose a “modified confinement” in the case of animals that have been previously vaccinated against rabies at least once in their life. In situations where such animals are bitten multiple times and/or are attacked by wildlife that have a high probability of being rabid or found positive through laboratory testing, Health Officers should consider imposing a strict confinement or euthanasia. The modified confinement can be imposed as follows:

1. Administer rabies vaccination immediately following the exposure. Owners should be reminded of the importance of following the confinement requirements despite the fact that the animal has received a vaccination.
2. The animal shall be kept in an area with a double barrier to prevent escape. This could include housing an animal in part of a house, as long as the animal does not have access to an exterior door. If the animal is allowed to go outside, it must be walked on a secure leash by an adult within a secure fence on the owner’s property.
3. Access to people shall be limited to one adult in the household who is aware of the potential for rabies transmission in the event that the animal is infected with rabies. The persons having direct contact with the animal shall be informed that they will require rabies prophylaxis in the event that the animal develops rabies and they have been exposed to the saliva.

**II. ANIMAL OBSERVATION PERIODS - EXPOSURE CATEGORIES 3 or 4:**

**A. If the animal is currently vaccinated:**

1. A report to the local health department is not necessary.

2. Administer a rabies booster vaccination to the exposed animal as soon as possible. If the animal does not receive a booster vaccination, distribute a copy of the Rabies Advisory Notice to the owner and have them observe the animal for signs of rabies for six months.
3. Distribute a copy of the Rabies Advisory Notice to the owner and advise them to observe the animal for clinical signs of rabies for a period of 45 days.

Note: Animals that have received a booster rabies vaccine due to exposure as required in A. 2. (Above), would not need an additional booster if exposed again within 8 weeks.

**B. If the animal is not currently vaccinated:**

1. A report to the local health department is not necessary.
2. Administer a rabies vaccination to the exposed animal as soon as possible.
3. Distribute a copy of the Rabies Advisory Notice to the owner and have them observe the animal for signs of rabies for six months.

### III. Summary of Animal Confinement Periods Utilized in Rabies Control

**10-day period:** Used by local health departments when a dog, cat, ferret or other domestic animal bites a human.

If rabies virus was present in saliva at the time of the bite, the biting animal would be exhibiting clinical signs of rabies or would develop signs within three days of the bite. If the dog or cat is free of clinical signs of rabies for a period of 10 days following the bite, rabies virus was not in the saliva at the time of the bite and the bite victim is not at risk of infection. There has never been a human case of rabies from a dog, cat, or ferret that was confined and observed to be healthy for a period of 10 days from the bite in the United States.

**45-day period:** Used when a currently immunized dog, cat, or other domestic animal is bitten or exposed to a rabid or suspect rabid animal.

This observation period is necessary because it is possible, but very unlikely, for a currently vaccinated animal that receives a booster rabies vaccination after exposure to still contract rabies. Exposed domestic animals should be vaccinated as soon as possible after the bite or exposure.

**6-month period:** Used when a dog, cat, or other domestic animal not currently immunized against rabies, is bitten or exposed to a rabid or suspect rabid animal.

This situation is of greatest concern because of significant chance that an unvaccinated domestic animal will develop rabies if exposed to the virus. The incubation period is usually less than 90 days, although there have been documented cases where clinical signs have not appeared until 5 to 6 months after exposure.

Prepared by: The New Jersey Department of Health, Infectious and Zoonotic Disease Program, Zoonotic Disease Unit

**MANAGEMENT OF DOMESTIC ANIMALS KNOWN OR SUSPECTED TO  
HAVE BEEN BITTEN BY OR EXPOSED TO A KNOWN OR SUSPECT RABID  
ANIMAL**

(Formerly Table 1 of Appendix III)

| Exposure Category   | Currently Vaccinated  | Not Currently Vaccinated  |
|---|---|---|
| <p><b>Category 1</b><br/>(visible bite from known or suspect rabid animal)</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- administer rabies vaccine ASAP</li> <li>- LHD issue confinement notice to owner</li> <li>- 45 day confinement</li> </ul>                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- euthanasia or 6-month confinement in approved pen or facility</li> <li>- LHD issue confinement notice</li> <li>- if previously vaccinated, vaccinate immediately</li> <li>- if never vaccinated, vaccinate 1 month before release</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Category 2</b><br/>(direct contact with known or suspect rabid animal; no visible wounds)</p>                             | <p>same as above</p>  | <p>same as above</p>  |
| <p><b>Category 3</b><br/>(bite wounds of unknown origin)</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- administer rabies vaccine</li> <li>- vet issues owner a Rabies Advisory Notice</li> <li>- observe animal for signs of rabies over 45 days</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- administer rabies vaccine</li> <li>- vet issues owner a Rabies Advisory Notice</li> <li>- observe animal for signs of rabies over 6 months</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Category 4</b><br/>(possible contact with, or in the vicinity of, a known or suspect rabid animal; no visible wounds)</p> | <p>same as above</p>  | <p>same as above</p>  |

**The entire State of New Jersey is now enzootic for raccoon and bat rabies virus variants**

## **RABIES ADVISORY NOTICE**

2014

Rabies is a fatal disease of warm-blooded mammals caused by a virus, most frequently spread through a bite from an infected animal. An infected animal has the rabies virus in its saliva and infects other animals or people through bites and contact with saliva. Once infected animals become ill, they may bite or attack other animals or people.

This notice is being provided to you because you are the owner of an animal which has been exposed to rabies through a bite, contact with a rabid animal, has suffered a wound of unknown origin suspected to be a bite wound, or because your pet has been near or in the same area as a known or suspect rabid animal.

You are advised to notify your local health department and to seek the advice of a veterinarian if your animal(s) shows any of the following clinical signs during the period of observation: fever, loss of appetite, excessive irritability, unusual vocalization, abnormal behavior, restlessness, jumping at noises, unprovoked aggression trouble walking, excess salivation, tremors, convulsions, or paralysis.

Rabies usually begins subtly, with pet owners first noticing that their animal stops eating and “doesn’t seem right.” The pet may then become restless and irritable, have a “strange look in its eyes,” and make funny-sounding cries and barks. As the illness progresses, nervous system impairment becomes more obvious with tremors, difficulty walking and swallowing, and possibly even convulsions and/or paralysis. Affected animals may or may not show signs of aggression and try to attack people or other animals. Livestock animals, e.g., cattle, horses and sheep, usually develop a paralytic or “dumb” form of rabies. These animals will initially be depressed and, as the disease progresses, they may have difficulty swallowing, become weak and uncoordinated, walk in circles, eat nonedible material, and bellow repeatedly. The animal may appear to be choking or dazed and disoriented.

Infected domestic animals can shed the virus in their saliva and potentially infect people and other animals up to 5 days before the first clinical signs of rabies are apparent. Raccoons, skunks and other wildlife can shed the rabies virus in their saliva for up to 2 weeks before clinical signs are apparent and clinical signs may be mild. Persons caring for exposed animals should take precautions to prevent exposure by minimizing contact with the exposed animals and, if contact is necessary, use rubber gloves, eye protection, hand washing and other protective measures.

At the first signs of illness isolate your exposed animal(s) from other animals and people and immediately contact your veterinarian or local health department.

If you have any questions about rabies in dogs, cats and other domestic pets, please contact your local health department ([www.localhealth.nj.gov](http://www.localhealth.nj.gov)); for questions about livestock, please contact the New Jersey Division of Animal Health at 609-671-6400.