

Rabies Policies and Procedures

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SUBJECT: Guidance Regarding 10-day Confinement of Animals for Rabies Observation

1. Introduction/Purpose

Animals that have potentially exposed a person to rabies through bite or other means must be evaluated to determine whether they may have been transmitting rabies at the time of the exposure incident. Under New York State (NYS) public health law¹ domesticated animals² may be observed for 10 days following an exposure incident to determine whether they were possibly shedding rabies virus. If a domesticated animal was shedding rabies virus in its saliva at the time of exposure, that animal will be showing signs of rabies either at the time of the exposure incident or within several days following the incident. Based on guidelines from the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices³, if a domesticated animal remains clinically normal for 10 days following a potential exposure incident, it is assumed that the animal was not shedding rabies at the time of the incident; therefore there was no rabies exposure. Determination of rabies status of animals other than domesticated animals requires euthanasia of the animal and testing of the animal's brain for evidence of rabies virus.

Under NYS Public Health Law effective 22 December 2011, "If the county health authority does not approve home confinement, the ten day confinement and observation period must take place, at owner's expense, at an appropriate facility such as an animal shelter, veterinarian's office, kennel or farm."

This document provides general guidelines and best practices for effective 10-day confinement of domesticated animals that have potentially exposed a person to rabies. The conditions under which an animal may be kept during, and the method by which an animal is evaluated at the end of, the 10-day confinement are ultimately determined by the local health department (LHD) with jurisdiction over the incident. LHD staff are in the best position to determine, in each situation, what confinement conditions will provide the greatest assurance that the animal will be available for follow-up at the end of confinement. Rabies response staff of the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) Bureau of Communicable Disease Control (BCDC) are available to discuss situations requiring further guidance. Contact BCDC staff at (518) 473-4439.

The following general principles should guide confinement decision-making, and are further detailed in this document:

- In general, healthy domesticated animals behaving normally at the time of a potential rabies exposure incident may be confined for 10-day observation at the owner's home. **Animals with neurologic disease, or that are acting unusually aggressive, should not be placed under 10-day confinement without consultation with BCDC rabies response staff.**
- In circumstances where owner compliance is in doubt, or where the exposing animal's exposure and vaccination history are unknown, confinement in a facility may be more appropriate.
- Confinement conditions should be explained and provided to owners in writing to ensure compliance.

¹ Article 21, Title 4, Section 2140, Subparagraph 7

² Domesticated animals include dogs, cats, ferrets, horses, donkeys, mules, cattle, sheep, goats, and pigs.

³ CDC. Human rabies prevention - United States, 2008: recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). MMWR. 2008; 57.

- Method of assessment of the animal at the end of confinement can vary from telephone confirmation with the owner to evaluation by a veterinarian, and will depend on the circumstances in each case.

Information on what is considered an exposure, as well as considerations to use in the assessment of risk in particular exposure incidents, can be found in the guidance document, “Guidance Regarding Human Exposure to Rabies and Postexposure Prophylaxis Decisions,” available at http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/zoonoses/rabies/docs/nys_rabies_treatment_guidelines.pdf.

2. Home vs. Facility Confinement

No animal that has been placed in 10-day confinement in New York State has ever gone on to develop rabies. Healthy, normal acting animals are considered low risk for rabies, and home confinement is generally appropriate. Facility confinement should be considered under the following circumstances:

- There are concerns about owner compliance, such as in situations involving potential legal action or other hostility between animal owner and bite victim.
- There is little known about the animal’s exposure and vaccination history, as might occur with stray or feral animals.
- The animal’s behavior or health is not normal.

Owner compliance concerns

- LHD staff should use broad discretion to consider facility confinement if an animal’s owner is not forthcoming with information, appears hostile or unreliable, or has a history of non-compliance.
- If the LHD is aware that legal action may be pending between a bite victim and animal owner, facility confinement may be advisable to ensure follow-up.
- Facility confinement may be necessary if an owner cannot meet the conditions of confinement, e.g., LHD determines animal must be kept indoors for confinement, but owner insists the animal can only be kept in the yard.

Lack of animal history

Stray or feral animals have greater opportunities than pets to become exposed to rabies without a person’s knowledge, and are typically unvaccinated. Recently acquired animals similarly may have little history. In these cases, if an owner is identified and home confinement is considered, it is especially important to ensure owner compliance.

Animal behavior/health status

An animal behaving abnormally (based on knowledge of that specific animal’s normal behavior, not just the general behavior of the breed or species) or demonstrating neurologic disease at the time it is involved in a potential rabies exposure of a person should be considered high risk for rabies and generally should be tested for rabies unless an alternative cause for the illness or behavior is established. In some situations, observation under a veterinarian’s care may be appropriate for the ill animal that has been involved in a human exposure. Examples include animals with a good vaccination history, and animals with little opportunity for rabies exposure (e.g., indoor-housed cats and dogs that are only leash-walked and never out of the owner’s sight).

These exposure situations should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, and discussed with BCDC staff to ensure that state and local health authorities are in agreement on the proper course of action. In all situations where observation and clinical workup of an abnormally acting animal is permitted, observation must occur in a veterinary hospital and not at the owner’s home.

3. Conditions of 10-day confinement

Documentation

Owners of animals under 10-day confinement **should be provided written documentation** stating, at a minimum:

- Start and end dates of confinement.
- Requirements for how the animal is to be confined.
- Signs of rabies to look for in the animal (e.g., changes in behavior, unusual aggression, weakness, lameness, paralysis, seizures).
- How the LHD should be notified, including after work hours, in the event the animal becomes ill.
- Consequences of failure to comply (e.g., immediate facility confinement at owner expense.)

Contact with the animal

It is generally not necessary to prevent members of the owner's household and immediate family from having contact with an animal under confinement, however contact with people or pets outside the household or immediate family should be limited to reduce the possibility of additional exposures.

Control of the animal

Confinement conditions should be established to ensure the animal is always under the owner's control and to minimize the risk of the animal escaping and being lost to follow up. Examples of confinement conditions include being loose inside the home; in a securely fenced yard or enclosure; or off the owner's property on a leash.

Unacceptable means of owner control of the animal include:

- Invisible fences
- Off leash on the assumption that the animal will respond to voice commands.

Relocation of the animal during confinement

Animals under confinement may not be moved from the jurisdiction of the LHD without prior approval of the local health Commissioner (or equivalent) of both the origin and destination locations. Out of state movement requires approval at both state health departments.

If relocation of an animal to another location is necessary, the owner should contact the LHD immediately to seek approval for the new location prior to moving the animal. In cases where the animal is not a resident of the county of exposure and has returned to its home county or state or will be returning to its home prior to the end of 10-day confinement, arrangements should be discussed with the LHD in the county of residence as soon as possible. For out of state movement, contact BCDC rabies response staff who will assist with arranging confinement and follow up with the other state.

For emergency movement (e.g., an emergency requiring admission to a veterinary hospital) owners should be instructed to contact the LHD as soon as possible.

4. Assessment of the animal at the end of confinement

LHD staff must verify that the animal is healthy before releasing the animal from confinement. Examples of methods of verification include:

- Verbal confirmation by the owner that the animal is healthy (provided owner reliability is not in question)
- Visit by animal control, law enforcement, or LHD staff to observe the animal
- Confirmation by a veterinarian that the animal was examined and determined not to be displaying signs of rabies

Verbal confirmation vs. visit and visual inspection

Assessment of animals when the exposed individuals are part of the owner's family can often be managed through verbal confirmation from the owner. For exposures to non-family members, or if there are concerns with the reliability of the owner for any reason, it is advisable to have an independent party such as an LHD staff person or animal control officer visually inspect the animal and document that visit. A veterinary exam is typically not necessary; the individual performing health verification should be familiar enough with animals to judge whether the animal appears to be healthy. If there is any question about the health status of the animal, referral should be made for veterinary evaluation at owner expense.

Veterinary exam to assess health status of the animal

A veterinary exam, with or without written documentation, may be necessary to verify the health of the animal in cases where:

- there is a question about the health of the animal at the end of confinement
- other circumstances warrant it (e.g., legal action between bite victim and animal owner).

In such cases, it is the responsibility of the owner to have the animal evaluated by a licensed veterinarian at the owner's expense. If appropriate based on the circumstances of the incident, the veterinarian should provide a signed, written statement verifying the health of the animal to the LHD before the animal is released from confinement.

5. Other considerations

Animals that have potentially exposed other animals

While not mandated in law or regulation, situations involving animal-to-animal exposure may warrant 10-day follow-up of the animal causing exposure. Such situations might include:

- Dog gets loose and attacks another dog that is not currently vaccinated
- Dog attacks unvaccinated farm animals
- Outdoor cats fight and wound each other and one or both are overdue for vaccination

In these cases, getting voluntary compliance for 10-day observation from the owner of the biting animal can avoid a 6 month quarantine of an unvaccinated bitten animal. The same policies regarding conditions and final assessment should apply to these incidents as to incidents involving human exposure.

Follow-up of animals outside the LHD's jurisdiction

For potential human exposures that occur outside the jurisdiction of the LHD (e.g., a county resident exposed out of state or in New York City) BCDC rabies response staff will assist with coordinating follow-up of animals.