

**Guidelines for veterinarians for handling possible rabies exposure  
and animal bites on Prince Edward Island**

**ALWAYS REMEMBER..... Rabies is a reportable disease under the Health of Animals regulations. If you suspect an animal has rabies, you MUST contact the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) office immediately.**

**Phone: 902-566-7290. After hours' emergency number: 506-381-7683  
(CFIA Office of Food Safety and Recall)**

**Handling Animal Bites to People:**

The office of the Chief Health Officer (CHO) (368-4996) is responsible for the initial investigation of animal bites, and in conjunction with the attending veterinarian assesses whether there is sufficient evidence to consider rabies exposure as a possibility. *A definitive diagnosis of a rabies infection can only be made through diagnostics. The CHO should be contacted by the veterinarian that examines the animal as a result of a bite incident. This may be a veterinarian at a private clinic, the Humane Society or AVC.*

If rabies is unlikely (*e.g., indoor cat/ferret; dog outside for walks on a leash only*):

- (1) The attending veterinarian should request the owner to confine the animal for 10 days, with supervision by the Environmental Health Inspectors.
- (2) The owner is advised to report any repeat biting, nervous signs or illness.
- (3) The owner is not to destroy, sell or give away the animal in the 10-day period without notifying the CHO.
- (4) If the owner has difficulty maintaining the confinement in their home, the CHO will assist with alternate arrangements.
- (5) The animal's behavior and health status will be confirmed by the veterinarian following the 10-day confinement. If it is healthy, the owner is free to do whatever they wish with the animal.

If rabies may be suspected (*e.g., vaccinated or unvaccinated pet that may have been bitten by a bat or carnivorous mammal; stray animal*):

- (1) The CHO will immediately contact the CFIA.
- (2) The CFIA veterinarian can order quarantine for a minimum of 10 days or recommend euthanasia with immediate testing. *As a result of the new post- 10-day quarantine period options available to the owner, any discussion regarding the animal must include the CFIA, the attending veterinarian and the owner.*

If an animal is presented to a veterinary clinic for euthanasia, the veterinarian must collect a complete history from the owner to determine if there has been a history of biting, and to assess whether rabies should be considered. If the veterinarian has questions about the assessment, he or she must contact either the CHO or the CFIA.

**Please note: In those animal bite situations where rabies is not suspected (i.e., the animal appears healthy), the 10-day observation period should always be recommended by the attending veterinarian. It is possible to obtain a false negative if testing is carried out before clinical signs develop. If the owner of the animal has any additional questions or concerns, they may call the CHO or the CFIA.**

### **Quarantine of a Rabies Suspect Animal**

A 10-day quarantine of a rabies suspect animal is an alternative to immediate euthanasia. When a quarantine order is issued by the CFIA, the owner of the animal is responsible for all costs incurred in establishing the quarantine site. CFIA will confirm that the quarantine requirements are met (e.g., pen, fenced enclosure, tied, chained, muzzled, etc.) and that the owner is in compliance with the quarantine order. *If after the 10-day quarantine period, the animal is confirmed to be healthy, then the owner may elect to keep the animal or have it euthanized. If the animal is a rabies suspect animal as a result of contact with a bat or wild carnivorous mammal, there are a number of options depending upon the vaccination status of the pet. These options are explained under the heading of Handling Animal Bites to Other Animals.*

### **Euthanasia and Testing of a Rabies Suspect Animal**

If a rabies suspect animal is euthanized, the veterinarian must wear gloves, mask and eye wear to prevent exposure while handling the animal. The head must be removed, double-bagged and labeled "Rabies Suspect", and kept refrigerated for pick up by the CFIA veterinarian for testing; the remainder of the carcass must be disposed of in accordance with provincial regulations. If there is no urgency for testing (i.e., no human contact), the specimen can be frozen. A detailed history and contact/owner information must accompany the specimen. *If the possibility of rabies is highly unlikely and the owner requests the return of the carcass for private arrangements, the remainder of the carcass may be returned after head removal. The owner needs to be informed of the steps to take for exposure prevention while handling the carcass.*

### **Handling Animal Bites to other Animals:**

In the case of a domestic animal that has been bitten, in contact with, or is suspected of being bitten by a bat or wild mammal, that is not available for testing, potential exposure to rabies must be assumed. CFIA has developed a new policy regarding the handling of pets that have been exposed to rabies-suspect or rabies-confirmed animals. The policy provides options for owners of vaccinated, primary vaccinated and non-vaccinated domestic pets.

*For a routinely vaccinated pet, the owner has the options of: 1). immediate rabies re-vaccination if within five days of the exposure to the rabies-suspect animal; 2). immediate rabies titre check if within five days of the exposure; 3). a 3-month quarantine or 4). immediate euthanasia.*

*For a primary vaccinated pet (having received one vaccine at least 30 days prior to the exposure), the owner has the option of: 1) immediate rabies re-vaccination if within five days of exposure; 2). A 3-month quarantine or 3) immediate euthanasia.*

*For a non-vaccinated pet, the owner has the option of 1). immediate euthanasia or 2) a 6-month quarantine followed by a recommended vaccination.*

*See Appendix A*

*If a veterinarian or an owner has any further questions or concerns, they are to call the CFIA District Veterinarian's office.*

## APPENDIX A

### Post Exposure Management of Vaccinated, Primary Vaccinated, and Non-vaccinated Pets Exposed to Rabies-Suspect or Rabies-Confirmed

Exposure = any domestic animal that is bitten or suspected of being bitten by a bat or carnivorous mammal

#### VACCINATED PET

1). Immediate revaccination can be done within five days following exposure.

- by private practitioner
  - at owner's expense
  - provides proof of revaccination to CFIA
- by CFIA vet
  - at owner's expense

45-day owner observation period starting at time of revaccination.

2). Immediate Rabies titre check can be done within five days following exposure

- by private practitioner
  - at owner's expense
- CFIA provides the private practitioner with blood collection/shipping instructions and submission forms for RFFI (rapid fluorescent foci inhibition) testing
- pet remains under owner observation until results obtained (approx. 10 days)
- owner provides CFIA with RFFI test results
  - titre > 0.5 IU/ml
    - pet placed under 45-day owner observation period beginning on the date the blood sample was taken
  - titre < 0.5 IU/ml
    - pet is deemed not vaccinated
    - follow steps for Non-vaccinated Pet

3). Three-month quarantine

- if owner does not elect revaccination
- if owner does not elect rabies titre check
- if >5 days post exposure to suspect rabid animal

4). Euthanasia

- owner's choice
- at owner's expense
- no transmission to human or other pet
  - not tested for rabies
- possible or confirmed transmission to human/pet
  - tested for rabies

## **PRIMARY VACCINATED PET**

Options 1, 3, or 4 of VACCINATED PET.

## **NON-VACCINATED PET** (no vaccine or initial vaccine <30 days)

1). Immediate humane euthanasia

- no to human/pet transmission

2). Six month quarantine

- recommend vaccinated for rabies by private practitioner at the end of the quarantine

-owner's expense

-no proof required by CFIA