



Health and Wellness

CHIEF PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICE

October 2015

Rabies Exposure Assessment

Exposure of a person to an animal suspected or known to be infected with rabies is a reportable event to the Chief Public Health Office in accordance with the [Public Health Act](#) (Sections 33, 34 and 36) and the [Notifiable Diseases and Conditions and Communicable Diseases Regulations](#) (Section 9.2).

The need to confine or euthanize and test suspect animals and/or provide rabies post exposure prophylaxis to the exposed human is based on an evaluation of the following risk factors which are detailed in the *Guidelines for the Management of Possible Rabies Exposure*:

- 1) The type of animal (wild animal versus domestic animal or livestock), including the risk of rabies in the animal species involved. Human exposure to any of the following animals must be reported immediately to the Chief Public Health Officer (CPHO) for investigation:
 - a) Stray dog/cat
 - b) Bat
 - c) Wild or exotic animal (e.g. raccoon, fox, skunk, coyote and other carnivores)
 - d) Domestic livestock (e.g. horse, pig, cow)
- 2) The nature of the exposure including severity and location of the wound. Bites to the head, neck and arms are more likely to lead to the transmission of rabies.
- 3) The circumstances of the exposure and the behavior of the animal, specifically a provoked or unprovoked attack¹, at the time of the exposure.
- 4) The availability of the animal for observation and/or laboratory testing of the animal brain.
- 5) Clinical signs of rabies displayed by the animal prior to the human exposure. Signs of rabies cannot be reliably interpreted in wild animals. An unprovoked attack is more likely to indicate that the animal is rabid. Rabid cats and dogs may, however, become uncharacteristically quiet.

Exposures involving a domestic dog/cat may be considered low risk if certain conditions can be verified. Low risk exposures may require only wound care and confirmation that the person exposed has an up to date tetanus shot. **For more information or to report a possible exposure to rabies please call the Chief Public Health Office at 902-368-4996 during business hours or after hours by paging the Chief Public Health Officer (or Deputy) on call.**

¹ A provoked exposure is one where the human did something to “provoke” the animal (even if the action was unintentional and the action would be the animal’s normal response to such a human action). Examples include:

- attempting to corner or trap the animal
- Entering an area that the animal considers its territory
- Coming too close to an injured animal or coming between two fighting animals
- Picking up an animal or petting an unfamiliar animal
- Interfering with an animal’s food or approaching an animal’s litter
- Interfering/wrestling with an animal’s owner

An unprovoked exposure is one where the person did not surprise, antagonize or threaten the animal or enter its territory.