



Rabies Information for Health Care Providers

According to the CDC:

Rabies is transmitted only when the virus is introduced into a bite wound, open cuts in skin, or onto mucous membranes such as the mouth or eyes.

Two Categories of Exposure:

1. **Bite:** any penetration of the skin by teeth constitutes a bite exposure. All bites, regardless of body site, represent a potential risk of rabies transmission, but that risk varies with the species' of biting animal, the anatomic site of the bite, and the severity of the wound.
2. **Nonbite:** the contamination of open wounds, abrasions, mucous membranes, or theoretically, scratches (potentially contaminated with infectious material from a rabid animal) constitutes a nonbite exposure.

Other contact by itself, such as petting a rabid animal and contact with blood, urine, or feces of a rabid animal, does not constitute an exposure and is not an indication for post-exposure vaccination.

Rabies virus becomes noninfectious when it dries out and when it is exposed to sunlight. Different environmental conditions affect the rate at which the virus becomes inactive, but in general, if the material containing the virus is dry, the virus can be considered noninfectious.

In the State of Montana, rabies is defined as a communicable disease that must be reported to the local Health Department. Unlike other communicable diseases, the *potential exposure* to rabies also must be reported to the local Health Department. Since the animal (viz. mammal) rabies vaccination is not 100% effective all animal bites must be reported to the local Health Department as a potential exposure.

Currently rabies vaccinations are only approved for domestic dogs, cats, ferrets, cattle, sheep and horses. Within 28 days after initial vaccination, a peak rabies virus antibody titer is reached, and the animal can be considered immunized. Rabies is communicable during the period of salivary shedding of rabies virus. Experimental and historical evidence indicate that domestic dogs, cats, and ferrets shed the virus a few days before clinical onset and during the illness.

Domestic pets will be placed in a 10 day quarantine and then be assessed by a Veterinarian for clinical signs of rabies. Unvaccinated domestic pets will receive a rabies vaccination before being released. Hybrids and wild animals will be considered non-vaccinates; the length of time between rabies virus appearing in the saliva and onset of symptoms is unknown for these animals. If we locate the wild animal or hybrid, it will be euthanized and tested for rabies so a PEP recommendation can be made. If it cannot be located, the wild animal will be assumed positive and PEP will be recommended.

Reminder: All PEP administrations must be reported to the City-County Health Department (CCHD) so we can report to the State DPHHS.

To help us keep rabies out of our community, we request that you report all animals bite to CCHD. Our Bite Report Form is available at <http://www.cchdmt.org/environmental-health/rabies-prevention>. If you are unable to fax, please feel free to call CCHD at 406-454-6950. A Sanitarian can take the information over the phone.

The HIPAA Privacy Rule recognizes the legitimate need for public health authorities and others responsible for ensuring public health and safety to have access to protected health information to carry out their public health mission. The Rule also recognizes that public health reports made by covered entities are an important means of identifying threats to the health and safety of the public at large, as well as individuals. Accordingly, the Rule permits covered entities to disclose protected health information without authorization for specified public health purposes. See 45 CFR 164.512(b)(1)(i).