

Rabies Prevention Policy

The following is the Rabies Prevention Policy of the Erie County Department of Health (ECDOH).

1. The purpose of the ECDOH Rabies Prevention Policy is to prevent any human death due to rabies.
Rabies is fatal to humans if post-exposure treatment is not administered; administered incorrectly, or administered too late. Post-exposure treatment consists of a series of 4 vaccinations (plus rabies immunoglobulin RIG on the first day) given in a large muscle, such as the arm, over a 21 day schedule.
2. All warm-blooded animal bites are considered possible exposure to the rabies virus and warrant investigation. For this reason it has been mandated by New York State Public Health Law that every animal bite be reported to the local Health Department.
3. Bites, scratches, contact of open wounds, sores, rashes or mucous membrane (i.e. eyes, nostrils, mouth or genitals) to saliva or nerve tissue of a suspected rabid animal is considered an exposure and should be reported. In addition, **bats in proximity to an unattended young child, sleeping individual, sensory or mentally impaired person may be considered a contact and should be reported.**
4. Any animal bite should be thoroughly cleansed with soap and water, as soon as possible, and medical attention should be sought immediately.
5. The Commissioner of Health is recommending rabies post-exposure treatment for anyone bitten by certain wild animals that are not captured. Report **ALL** animal bites to the Health Department.
6. The biting animal **MUST** be identified if it is an owned pet, or captured if it is a stray cat, dog or wild animal.
7. A bite by an uncaptured wild animal may need immediate evaluation. Call 961-6800 or the emergency number 961-7898 evenings and weekends if necessary.
8. A biting dog, cat, ferret or domestic farm animal can be confined for observation for ten (10) days. If no symptoms develop, there is no danger of rabies exposure for the person bitten.
9. A biting stray cat, dog or wild animal, if captured, will be submitted to the New York State Rabies Laboratory and tested for the virus. Bites from exotic animals and primates will be evaluated by the Health Department on a case-by-case basis.
10. If a cat or dog fights with a known or suspected rabid animal, the rabies virus in the animal's saliva may remain alive on the pet's skin for up to two (2) hours and up to fifteen minutes in its mouth. If it is necessary to handle the pet during this period, wear gloves. Wash the pet with soap and water. Call the Erie County Health Department (ECHD) to report the incident.

11. Animals which are frequently confirmed to be rabid in New York State, and are presumed to be rabid, are: raccoons, bats, foxes and skunks.
12. Animals which are occasionally found to be rabid in New York State include dogs, cats, ferrets, horses, cows, sheep, deer, woodchucks, opossums, coyotes, and otter.
13. If any wild animal behaves in a strange manner such as; excessively aggressive, displays paralysis of the hind quarters of the body, has a slack or drooping jaw, acts tame, has no fear of humans, is disoriented, or wandering aimlessly;
 - Leave it alone!! Unless there is a bite involved, no agency is responsible for a wild animal but, if there is a real threat to public safety, you can call your animal control officer, local police or the DEC to capture or kill the animal.
 - If you choose to destroy the animal yourself, use a method that will not damage the head or expose you to saliva or nervous tissue. DO NOT TOUCH the animal at any time without using rubber gloves or a plastic bag.
14. If an animal is found dead on your property and you have no reason to believe that a person or pet has been in contact with its saliva or nerve tissue, recommended disposal is burial or double bag and place in the garbage.
15. Valid rabies vaccination for dogs, cats and domestic ferrets four months of age and older is mandatory in Erie County.
16. Vaccination is not an absolute guarantee of protection from rabies for your pet. Any vaccinated pet which encounters a known or suspected rabid animal must receive a booster shot within five (5) days.
17. Any unvaccinated pet which is exposed to a known or suspected rabid animal must be either sacrificed and properly disposed of or confined in a manner acceptable to the Health Department for six (6) months at the expense of the owner.
18. Should your animal develop any rabies-like symptoms (see #13), isolate it and contact the Health Department as well as your veterinarian.
19. Any person who is at risk for exposure to rabies by frequent contact with warm-blooded animal saliva or bodily fluids may want to consider rabies pre-exposure vaccination as a precaution. For information, contact this Department at 961-6800.