
Rabies Response Information Update

May 16 2014

Rabies Response Plan in Ontario (as of 01-Apr-2014) Quick-Reference for Veterinarians

Who to call / Hierarchy of referral:

1. **Human exposure to a potentially rabid animal → Local Public Health (PH) Unit**
 - Phone numbers for individual health units can be found at:
http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/system/services/phu/location_areas.aspx#7
 - If there is concurrent domestic animal exposure, OMAF will deal with this component **after** Public Health has done their evaluation
2. **Domestic animal exposure to a potentially rabid animal, NO human exposure → OMAF**
 - Call the Agricultural Information Contact Centre: 1-877-424-1300
3. **Abnormal domestic animal, NO other domestic animal exposure, NO human exposure → local veterinarian**
 - Rabies can be a differential for any acute neurological disease in domestic animals. Even with proper handling and precautions, there is almost always some risk that a person or another animal has been exposed in these cases; therefore a risk assessment must be performed by PH or OMAF (see 1 and 2).
 - If a neurological animal dies and rabies is a differential, *testing will only be performed by Public Health or OMAF if there was exposure of a person or another (live) domestic animal*. Otherwise testing is at the discretion and expense of the owner/veterinarian (\$106 plus shipping).
 - This is best done through the Animal Health Laboratory (AHL), as testing for other differentials will likely be required.
 - Veterinarians must ensure that any samples are appropriately shipped (according to Transportation of Dangerous Goods regulations) even if being sent to AHL.
See AHL submission guideline online at:
<http://www.guelphlabservices.com/AHL/SubmitSpecimens.aspx>
4. **Abnormal wildlife, NO domestic animal exposure, NO human exposure → MNR**
 - Call the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) public Rabies Hotline: 1-888-574-6656
 - MNR will not test bats for rabies; they are only involved in control of terrestrial rabies.

NOTES:

- The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) will no longer respond to cases regarding potential rabies exposure; however, rabies remains a federally reportable disease under the *Health of Animal Act*. CFIA continues to manage regulations regarding rabies vaccination requirements for import of animals.
- Bats, foxes and skunks are the main rabies reservoirs in Ontario, and raccoons along the US border are considered a risk due to possible incursion of raccoon rabies. However, any mammal can be infected.
- OMAF generally does **not** get involved in cases of fights between domestic animals (e.g. dog vs dog) unless there is reason to believe that one of the animals has or may develop rabies due to another exposure (e.g. one dog has acute neurological signs (including sudden increased aggression)). There is otherwise no requirement for observation or detention of either animal, *unless a human has been bitten* (see below).

Rabies exposure is a medical urgency, but not an emergency. In general, OMAF will address most out-of-hours rabies calls the next business day, unless there are exceptional circumstances requiring a more immediate response.

For all reported cases of potential rabies exposure of domestic animals, a complete risk assessment will be performed by OMAF staff at the earliest opportunity (typically same day or next business day, depending on when the report is received) **to determine if testing or observation / confinement of an animal is required.** Should any such actions be required, OMAF staff will work closely with the animal owner and veterinarian involved to do so.

- Veterinarians involved in sample collection and submission based on an OMAF risk assessment are eligible for remuneration from OMAF, and OMAF will cover all sample shipping costs.
- Assistance from private veterinarians in these cases is strictly voluntary. If an individual is not comfortable with any part of the process, he/she is not required to assist. In this event, other local veterinary staff may be approached by OMAF to assist instead.

Complete instructions will be provided on an individual case-by-case basis. **Veterinarians only need to remember to continue to report suspected cases and exposures as they always have, just using a different phone number!**

- **As always**, if the offending animal (i.e. the one suspected of carrying rabies (wildlife or domestic)) is accessible it should be kept in case testing is required. Pending the OMAF/PH risk assessment:
 - For **live** wildlife, contact a local wildlife control company to assist with containment
 - For **dead** animals (wild or domestic), place the body in a cool place (ideally fridge or freezer) where it will not be scavenged
 - For **large** animals, options include:
 - Ship to AHL at owner's expense (good option if a full post-mortem or additional diagnostics may be required, **for both large and small animals**)
 - Remove the head (using appropriate protective equipment – this should always be done by a veterinarian) and store it in a cool place IF the rest of the carcass needs to be buried before the complete risk assessment can be performed (e.g. on a hot summer weekend)

Samples required:

- Bats
 - Save the entire carcass
 - Make SURE it is dead
 - Note: freezing is no longer considered an acceptable means of euthanasia for bats
- Animals <100 kg (e.g. dog, cat, fox, skunk, raccoon)
 - Save the entire head
 - Sampling videos available (fresh & frozen) – contact OMAF
- Animals >100 kg (e.g. livestock)
 - Save entire brain
 - Sampling video available (bovine) – contact OMAF

Potentially exposed animals:

To err on the side of caution, any potentially exposed animal should be confined until the complete risk assessment can be performed. Recommendations for short-term confinement include:

- Do not visit public places where dogs are likely to have direct contact with other dogs
- Keep dogs on leash at all times
- Keep cats indoors
- Isolate livestock from the rest of the herd / other animals
- Minimize the number of people handling the animal (ideally assign one caretaker)
- Avoid contact with the animal's mouth/nose/saliva
 1. No licking or kissing pets
 2. No oral manipulation of livestock (e.g. placing bits for horses)

Required reporting of animal-human bites & Public Health response:

- Public health units must be notified of **all** mammal bites to humans, regardless of an animal's vaccination history, for appropriate follow-up, investigation and risk assessment.

For all reported mammal bites to humans and other cases of potential human exposures to rabies, the public health unit will perform a complete risk assessment, which involves imposing a 10- to 14-day observation period on the biting animal, if it is a domestic animal.

At the present time, public health units do not have the capacity to collect and process specimens for rabies testing of domestic animals that do not survive the required observation period following a biting incident. As a result, animals involved in a biting incident CANNOT be euthanized prior to being released from the observation by local public health authorities, unless there are clear and significant animal welfare concerns with keeping the animal alive.

- Veterinarians must ascertain whether an animal brought in by a client for euthanasia has bitten anyone in the preceding 10 days. Permission to euthanize any animal involved in a biting incident within the past 10 days must be obtained from the local public health unit prior to euthanasia.
- Until public health capacity to collect and process specimens for rabies testing is fully restored within the province, individuals who have been bitten by an animal that dies prior to being released from the required observation period will need to receive rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (rabies vaccine +/- rabies immunoglobulin), unless specimen collection can be arranged on an individual *ad hoc* basis.
- Euthanizing an animal with no clinical signs prior to the end of an observation period in order to test for rabies can possibly result in a false negative test result, and is to be avoided even when specimen collection for rabies testing is available.

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