

# ANIMAL BITES



Texas Department of State Health Services

# Animal Bites

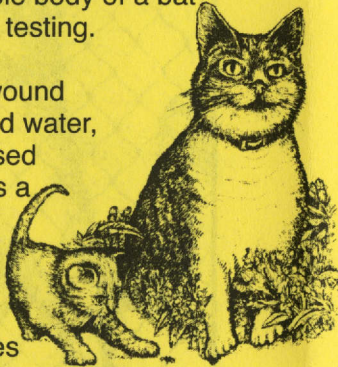
## What should you do if an animal bites you?



Rabies is a viral disease that affects warm-blooded animals (such as a dog, cat, skunk, fox, raccoon, bat, etc.). The virus is spread when saliva containing rabies virus is introduced into an opening in the skin, usually by the bite (or possibly scratch) of a rabid animal. You can also get rabies if the saliva from a rabid animal contacts your mucous membranes or any open wounds.

If a bite occurs, the following precautions should be taken:

- Identify the animal. Most animals that have bitten a person must either be quarantined and observed for signs of rabies **or** tested for rabies. If the animal is to be tested, a qualified person should separate the animal head from the body and submit the head (or whole body of a bat or rodent) for laboratory testing.
- Immediately wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water, plus apply an iodine-based antiseptic if available, as a first aid procedure.
- Consult a physician as soon as possible to determine whether rabies postexposure treatment is needed. In addition, bite wounds can become infected. A physician will decide if you need antibiotics. You should also check with a physician about the possible need for a tetanus shot.



## Who is in charge when an animal bites a person?

- All cities and counties in Texas **must** designate someone to handle animal bite cases. This person is called the "Local Rabies Control Authority" (LRCA).
- The LRCA is responsible for investigating animal bites, ensuring proper management of biting animals, and enforcing state and local rabies laws.

## What happens to the animal that bites a person?

Dogs, Cats, and Ferrets (Domestic): Regardless of vaccination status, the dog, cat, or ferret **must** be quarantined **or** euthanized (humanely killed). If euthanized, do not damage the brain, as it must be submitted to a rabies laboratory for testing. If the animal is to be quarantined, the time frame for the 10-day observation period begins at the time the bite occurred, even if the animal is not physically confined until sometime later.

High-Risk Animals: Free-roaming skunks, bats, foxes, coyotes, and raccoons **must** be euthanized, and their heads must be submitted for rabies testing. As defined in Texas law, a free-roaming animal is one that is not in captivity or has been in captivity for less than 200 days immediately before the bite incident occurs. If a high-risk animal is not considered to be free-roaming, refer to Texas Administrative Code, Rabies Control and Eradication, for details on how to handle a bite incident.

Low-Risk Animals: Opossums, shrews, moles, squirrels, gophers, mice, rabbits, rats, and armadillos do not need to be quarantined or tested unless the LRCA has reason to suspect that the biting animal has rabies.

Other Biting Animals: All biting animals that are not categorized as dogs, cats, or domestic ferrets, free-roaming high-risk, or low-risk must either be euthanized and tested **or** quarantined or suitably confined as deemed appropriate by the LRCA for a 30-day observation period.

## What is quarantine?

Quarantine means placing the animal in a facility that provides:

(1) absolute security (no escape possible);  
(2) no contact with other animals or people except for contact necessary for its care; and  
(3) observation twice daily by a qualified person. Quarantine **must** be in one of the following facilities:

- (a) quarantine facility licensed by the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS);
- (b) veterinary clinic operated by a veterinarian\*;
- (c) home confinement if approved by the LRCA.

The DSHS is responsible for inspection of all rabies quarantine facilities; however, the LRCA is responsible for the proper handling and observation of all animals being quarantined.

## What about home confinement?

The LRCA may authorize home confinement if:

(1) the biting animal was vaccinated against rabies and the time elapsed since the most recent vaccination has not exceeded the manufacturer recommendations for the vaccine (if an unvaccinated animal is not over 4 months of age, it may be allowed home confinement);

(2) the biting animal was not a stray at the time of the bite;

(3) the home has an enclosure that will provide the required security and isolation;

(4) the animal's custodian monitors the animal's behavior and health status and reports any changes to the LRCA right away; and

(5) the LRCA or a veterinarian observes the animal at least on the first and last days of the home confinement.

A rabies vaccination certificate signed by a veterinarian is the only acceptable proof of vaccination. Local policies may prohibit home confinement.

### What if and Who pays?

- What if the animal gets sick while in quarantine?

The animal should be examined by a veterinarian and if it is determined that it shows clinical signs of rabies, the head must be submitted for testing. The bite victim should be notified if the animal develops clinical signs consistent with rabies so that consultation on rabies treatment can be obtained. If the animal dies, the head must be removed and tested for rabies.

- Who pays for quarantine?

The owner of the biting animal is required by state law to pay the cost of the quarantine.



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### What are the rabies vaccination requirements in Texas?

- Texas state law requires that pet owners have their dogs and cats vaccinated against rabies by 4 months of age. Based on the type of vaccine used, plus requirements established in state law and local ordinance, the veterinarian responsible for administering the vaccine will determine a vaccination schedule for each animal.
- Local ordinances may have more stringent requirements than state law about rabies vaccinations.
- Rabies vaccine for animals must be administered by a veterinarian or under the direct supervision of a veterinarian. Animal rabies vaccine can only be sold or distributed to veterinarians. Veterinarians cannot legally sell vaccine to their clients except for use in livestock if a veterinarian-client-patient relationship exists. Veterinarians must issue a completed rabies vaccination certificate for each dog and cat.

### How can I help prevent animal bites?

- Do not approach or try to handle animals, including dogs and cats, that you do not know.
- Do not touch sick or injured animals. Call and report them to an animal control officer.
- Do not let your pets roam; keep them restrained. Train and socialize them so they are calm around people.
- Educate children about bite prevention. Children are the most common victims of severe dog bites.

\* A veterinarian is a person licensed to practice veterinary medicine in the United States.

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