

Rabies and Animal Exposure Reporting Requirements

Attention: Physicians, Family Health Teams, Nurse Practitioners, Emergency Departments, Urgent Care/Walk-in Clinics

Date: November 16, 2023

The reporting to public health units of animal exposures which could result in the transmission of rabies to people continues to be a longstanding requirement of the Health Protection and Promotion Act (HPPA). Ontario Regulation 557 Section 2(1) states:

A physician ... or any other person who has information concerning **either or both of the following shall**, as soon as possible, notify the Medical Officer of Health and provide the Medical Officer of Health with the information, including the name and contact information of the exposed person, for:

1. **Any bite from a mammal.**
2. Any contact with a mammal that is conducive to the potential transmission of rabies to persons.
O. Reg. 501/17, s. 1.

Although the risk in Simcoe Muskoka for rabies is currently low, terrestrial rabies (fox strain and raccoon strain) is present in Ontario, and we continue to have a well-established low-level prevalence of rabies in our bat population. So far this year, Simcoe Muskoka has had 3 bats test positive for rabies. Since translocation of rabies into our area is a very real possibility, all bites and scratches from any mammals should be managed as possible rabies exposures and should be reported to the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) for further investigation.

Prompt reporting of animal bites to public health ensures immediate public health risk assessment and investigation resulting in optimal patient care and often a reduced need for rabies post-exposure prophylaxis. SMDHU investigated just under 1,600 reported animal bites last year; however, through our investigation, only 235 people needed to complete a rabies post-exposure prophylaxis series. SMDHU is a resource for physicians to assist in rabies exposure assessment, providing information and resources on our [Health Professionals Portal](#) as well as telephone consultation with our Rabies Program Coordinator.

Local rabies data can now be accessed on our HealthStats webpage at:
<http://www.simcoemuskokahealthstats.org/topics/environment/rabies>



What should health care practitioners do when a patient presents with a bat, wildlife or domestic animal exposure?

1. Please complete the [Rabies and Animal Exposure Incident Report Form](#) to assist with the collection of required reporting information. All reported incidents will be investigated by a Public Health Inspector (PHI). All animal exposure incidents may be reported by faxing a copy of the completed *Rabies and Animal Exposure Incident Report Form* through our **Designated Rabies Fax line** at 705-725-8132.

Note: **Facial, neck, head and hand bites from mammals** are higher risk for transmission (with potential for a shorter incubation period) and **direct contact with bats or wild terrestrial animals (e.g., raccoons, skunks or foxes)**, also poses elevated risk for rabies exposure. Such incidents should also be **verbally reported** at **705-721-7520** or **1-877-721-7520** ext. **8811** (Monday – Friday 8:30am – 4:30pm) or after hours at **1-888-225-7851** (evenings, weekends or holidays).

2. In instances where there is a **bat or wild terrestrial animal exposure**, please ask the client if they have the animal available for testing. If so, please provide information about the status and location of the animal in question when reporting to the health unit. If possible, the animal should be safely captured (or retrieved if dead) and tested for rabies when there has been a human exposure. Such testing can help to avoid or reduce rabies prophylaxis for exposed patients. Extreme care should always be taken to ensure that there is no further exposure when the animal is captured or handled. In the event that a wild animal is captured, it should be submitted for rabies testing; SMDHU staff are available to facilitate such testing.

Unless exposure from a bat or wild terrestrial animal is to the head, neck or hand region, rabies vaccine and immunoglobulin administration can be delayed for up to 48 hours until the rabies test result on the bat is obtained. If vaccination is initiated, it can be discontinued if the bat test is later found to be negative for rabies. Results are usually available within 48 hours, however, result times can occasionally take longer because of collection schedules, courier limitations and delays on weekends.

3. **If the animal involved is domestic** (such as a dog or a cat), the SMDHU will implement a 10-day observation period, regardless of the rabies vaccination status of the animal, to ensure it is not infectious with the rabies virus. Domestic animals should not be relocated without SMDHU approval within this time period and every effort should be made to ensure the animal involved remains in the care of an approved care giver.
4. When determining the need for post exposure rabies immunization, the current [Ministry of Health Management of Potential Rabies Exposures Guideline, 2020](#) is recommended as a resource. To access **rabies vaccine and immunoglobulin**, please contact the Rabies Coordinator at ext. **8894** or after hours at **1-888-225-7851**.

The following **rabies related resources** for Health Professionals are found under the Environmental Health tab of the Health Unit's website:

<http://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/JFY/HPPortal/PCPCategories/InfectiousDiseases/Rabies.aspx>

- [Rabies PEP Dose Schedule](#) (dose and schedule of vaccine and immune globulin)
- [Recommendations for Administration of Rabies PEP](#) (administration of the Rabies Vaccine and Immunoglobulin, such as needle size and injection location)
- [Management of Potential Rabies Exposures Guideline, 2020](#)
- [Canadian Immunization Guide](#)
- [PHO: How to Administer Rabies Post-Exposure Prophylaxis](#)
- [Rabies and Animal Exposure Incident Report Form](#)

- [Management of patients with suspected rabies exposure, 2017](#)

Please contact the Environmental Health - Health Connection line at 705-721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520 ext. 8811 with any questions about rabies. For questions about **rabies vaccination or request rabies vaccine and immunoglobulin** contact our Rabies Coordinator at ext. 8894, or after hours at 1-888-225-7851.