



North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
Division of Public Health – Epidemiology Section
Communicable Disease Branch-Veterinary Public Health
1902 Mail Service Center • Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-1902
Telephone: 919-733-3410 Fax: 919-733-0490

Michael F. Easley, Governor
Dempsey Benton, Secretary

Leah Devlin, DDS, MPH
State Health Director

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MEMORANDUM

To: North Carolina Licensed Veterinarians
From: Carl Williams, State Public Health Veterinarian
Subject: Rabies

North Carolina continues to struggle with the ongoing epizootic of rabies in raccoons. In many ways we are fortunate to have low human mortality in the face of widespread wildlife rabies. However this success is no accident, it is due to effective public health strategy throughout NC based on timely laboratory diagnosis, investigation of animal cases, and availability of post exposure prophylaxis. By far though, our most effective tool is education of the public by veterinarians to avoid contact with wildlife and enforcement of dog and cat vaccination laws. Rabies control in pets is proven to be the most effective mechanism to prevent rabies in humans. I am writing to you now to provide answers to some commonly asked questions that will help you in your practice, and help protect public health.

What should be done when a dog or cat bites a person?

Any dog or cat (regardless of rabies vaccination status) that bites a person must be confined and observed for a 10-day period of time per NCGS 130A-196. The person owning the animal or in control or possession of the animal shall notify the local health director immediately that a bite occurred. You are the person in control of that animal if it bit someone while in your clinic. The local health director designates the location and conditions of the 10-day confinement. Any dog or cat that dies, *for any reason*, during the 10-day confinement period following a bite must be submitted to the NC SLPH for rabies diagnostic testing per NCGS 130A-199. If signs suggestive of rabies develop during the 10-day confinement period, the animal should be euthanized and the head submitted for rabies testing. Although you should not provide medical advice to people, you should advise human bite victims to see their health care provider if they have sustained an animal bite.

What are the rabies vaccination requirements for dogs and cats?

Dogs and cats in NC are required to be vaccinated against rabies by four months of age per NCGS 130A-185. Although rabies vaccination of ferrets is not required by law it is strongly encouraged. Dogs and cats should be re-immunized 12 months after the initial vaccination and vaccinated every 1, 3, or 4 years thereafter depending on the vaccine used. Because a rapid anamnestic response is expected, an animal is considered currently vaccinated immediately after a booster vaccination, regardless of any lapse in vaccination. State law does not require that dogs or cats be “re-started” on the initial (one year) vaccine if there has been any lapse in rabies vaccination status.

What should be done when a dog or cat is potentially exposed to rabies?

See flow chart on reverse side of sheet. Reference NCGS 130A-197.

Where can I find more information?

Feel free to call us at 919-733-3410 during normal business hours with any questions. For emergency situations we can be reached at 919-733-3419 after hours and on weekends and holidays. For detailed rabies information and a copy of the North Carolina Manual for Rabies Prevention and Animal Bite Management please visit us online at: <http://www.rabies.ncdhhs.gov/>



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Everywhere. Everyday. Everybody.

