

## Management of Animals that Bite Humans

### Dogs, Cats, and Ferrets

- A healthy dog, cat, or ferret that bites a person should be quarantined for 10 days, **regardless of current vaccination status**. Administration of rabies vaccine is not recommended during the quarantine period so as not to induce any adverse vaccination reactions (e.g. lameness) that could be characterized as neurological disease.
- At the first sign of illness or behavioral change in the animal, the local county health department and/or the state health department agency should be notified and the animal should be evaluated by a veterinarian. If clinical signs are suggestive of rabies, the animal should be euthanized immediately and tested. Following a positive rabies test result, the local county health department should notify any persons or animal owners who might have been exposed to the rabid animal of the test results.
- The animal must be quarantined with a licensed veterinarian unless the animal qualifies for home quarantine.
- Home quarantine is allowed if the animal is an assistance animal and meets all the criteria specified in *Rules of the Alabama State Board of Health Bureau of Communicable Disease*, Chapter 420-4-4 Rabies Control Program pages 61-62.
- For further information concerning quarantines, please contact your local health department or Alabama Department of Public Health at 1-800-338-8374 or 334-206-5969.

### Other biting animals (wild animals, animals maintained in zoological parks, canine or feline wild/domestic hybrids, etc.)

Management of animals other than dogs, cats, and ferrets depends on the species, the circumstances of the bite, the epidemiology of rabies in the area, and the biting animal's history, current health status, and potential for exposure to rabies. The Zoonosis Branch, Epidemiology Division, Department of Public Health, should be consulted when circumstances warrant.

### Wildlife

- Most wild mammals that bite or otherwise expose persons should be **considered** for euthanasia and rabies examination. All bites by such wildlife must be considered possible exposures to the rabies virus. Since the duration of clinical signs and the period of viral shedding are unknown for these species, an appropriate quarantine or isolation period

cannot be ascertained. Assessing rabies risk and the need for rabies diagnostic testing can be guided by the following:

- **Wild Carnivores:** Raccoons, skunks, and foxes are the terrestrial animals most often infected with rabies; therefore, any such animal that exposes a person should be euthanized at once (without unnecessary damage to the head) and the brain should be submitted for rabies testing.
- **Rodents and lagomorphs** (squirrels, rats, mice, hamsters, guinea pigs, gerbils, chipmunks, rabbits): are almost never found to be infected with rabies and have not been known to transmit rabies to humans. Bites by these animals are usually not considered a rabies risk and usually do not warrant rabies testing unless the animal is sick or behaving in an unusual manner. Rodents that **are** considered to be a rabies risk include woodchucks or groundhogs (*Marmota monax*) because they are frequently large enough to survive the attack of a rabid carnivore. For additional questions or guidance about whether to submit an animal for testing please contact the Alabama Department of Public Health.
- **Bats:** A bat that bites, scratches, or has any direct physical contact with a person should be safely captured (see page 41 for instructions), immediately euthanized, and the entire animal sent to the laboratory for rabies examination. People usually know when they have been bitten by a bat. However, because bats have small teeth that may leave marks that are not easily seen, there are situations in which rabies testing and medical advice should be sought even in the absence of an obvious bite wound. These include awakening to find a bat in the room, finding a bat in the room of an unattended child, having a bat physically brush against you, or finding a bat near a mentally impaired or intoxicated person. In these situations a bite cannot be definitively ruled out. If physical contact occurs or the situations above occur, and the bat is not available for testing (i.e., it escapes from the house, encounter occurs outdoors, etc.), an exposure could be considered possible and consultation with a physician is advised.
- **Other wild animals** (opossums, otters, polecats, beavers, weasels, etc.): In most situations involving non-reservoir species, the rabies risk is relatively low. The risk is higher and, consequently, rabies testing may be indicated if the animal is found in a rabies-endemic area, has opportunity for exposure to rabies reservoirs, is large enough to survive an attack by a rabid animal, or is ill or exhibiting abnormal behavior.