

Incubation Period and Duration of Disease

Clinical Signs

The signs and symptoms of rabies in domestic species are similar; however, those in individual animals, even of the same species, can vary widely. Sometimes, a rabies-infected animal can die suddenly, after exhibiting few or no symptoms to the casual observer. Three stages or phrases generally occur in the course of rabies: (1) *Prodromal* or initial stage; (2) *Excitative* (i.e. “furious” rabies in the dog); and (3) *Paralytic* (i.e. “dumb” rabies in the dog). The Excitative stage almost always terminates in paralysis, though occasionally an animal may die during the course of severe convulsions prior to development of full prostration and paralysis. In some animals, the Excitative stage may be slight or absent in which case the clinical picture will be paralysis. Hydrophobia, literally the “fear of water,” is a descriptive term applied to clinical rabies in man and stems from the severe, involuntary, and painful spasms provoked by attempts to drink, or sometimes the mere sight or sound of water. The syndrome does not occur in animals, so the term hydrophobia correctly applies only to rabies in man.

Domestic Animals		
Dogs	Incubation Period	Average 3 – 8 weeks. Known range: 9 days to 8 ½ months
	Prodromal Stage	2 – 3 days duration
	Excitative Stage	1 – 7 days duration, rarely longer than 10-12 days
	Paralytic Stage	1 – 4 days duration
Cats and Ferrets	Incubation Period	Similar to dogs
	Duration of Disease	Similar to dogs
Other Animals		
Horses and Mules	Incubation Period	Average 3 weeks – 3 months; rarely 2 weeks or over 3 months
	Duration of Disease	5 – 8 days
Cattle	Incubation Period	Average 2 – 10 weeks; rarely as long as 6 months
	Duration of Disease	Typically 1 ½ – 6 days; rarely as long as 14 days
Sheep and Goats	Incubation Period	2 – 17 weeks documented
	Duration of Disease	5 – 7 days
Swine	Incubation Period	2 – 4 weeks
	Duration of Disease	2 – 4 days

****If a dog, cat, or ferret is without any signs of abnormality on the 10th or more day after inflicting a bite, it is safe to assume that the animal was NOT shedding virus in saliva (it was NOT INFECTIOUS) at the time of the bite**** This statement, however, cannot be applied to other species of animals. (For more quarantine information, see page 26 of this Manual.)