

# Rabies

Pets are wonderful companions. Be a responsible pet owner and vaccinate your pet against rabies. If your pet should bite someone, take responsibility for its actions by following the guidelines below:

## What to do if your pet bites someone

Even if a pet's bite can be explained (for example, someone stepped on your dog's tail or a child reached through your fence to pet the animal), it's important to take responsibility for your pet's actions.

1. Confine your pet immediately and check on the victim's condition. Assist the victim to immediately wash the victim's wound with soap and water for at least fifteen minutes. The victim should, if necessary, seek medical help.
2. Give the victim your contact information, your veterinarian's name and phone number and the date of your pet's last rabies vaccination.
3. State law requires all dog and cat bites that break the skin to be reported (even if your pet has a current rabies vaccination). To report a bite, call the Animal Enforcement Office in the Sheriff's Department at (828) 697-4912.
4. Cooperate with the animal control officer who contacts you to ask for information about your pet. He/she will give you some information about what will happen next.
5. Unfortunately, an animal bite can be costly for both the victim and the pet owner. If your pet has had a rabies vaccination and you provide the documentation, the victim will not have to go through an expensive series of rabies vaccines.
6. After any bite, your pet must be confined for 10 days, even if it has had the rabies vaccine. The local health director decides where your pet must be confined. This could be a veterinarian's office, a public or private animal shelter or even at your own home residence. If you want to request a Home Confinement for your pet you will need to complete paperwork the animal control officer gives you right away and get this to the Public Health Department. If your pet must be confined in a shelter or at the veterinarian's office, you are responsible for any costs related to the confinement.
7. Some owners are scared that their pet will be destroyed and will refuse to give the victim or animal control officer any information or they may even try to hide their pet. This is against the law and causes problems for the victim as the victim will need to receive a series of expensive rabies vaccinations. Remember all pets (even those with a current rabies vaccination) must be confined for 10 days after a bite. If it shows no signs of rabies, your pet will be released from confinement and back to you.

## **What to do if someone's pet bites you**

1. Immediately wash your hands, affected areas and the wound thoroughly with soap and water for at least fifteen minutes.
2. If you've been bitten by someone's pet, ask the owner for contact information, their veterinarian's name and phone number and the date of their pet's last rabies examination.
3. If the owner cannot be found, call the Sheriff's Department at (828) 697-4912 to report the bite and everything you know about the animal. Include the owner's name and contact information if you have it, a description of the animal and where you've seen the animal before. Try to include any details that could help the officer locate the animal.
4. No matter how minor the bite seems, seek medical care with your health care provider, urgent care clinic or the hospital emergency room.
5. The health care provider will contact the Sheriff's Department for you.
6. State law requires all dog and cat bites that break the skin to be reported. If you need to report a bite, call the Sheriff's Department at (828) 697-4912.
7. Contact the Health Department at (828) 694-4015. A nurse can talk with you about your exposure and help you decide if you need to get rabies vaccines. She can answer your questions about what happens next and how you can get the help you need.

## **What to do if your pet bites you**

1. If your own pet bites you, confine it immediately and call your veterinarian to check its vaccination records.
2. No matter how minor the bite seems, seek medical care with your health care provider, urgent care or the hospital emergency room.
3. The health care provider will contact the Sheriff's Department for you.
4. State law requires all dog and cat bites that break the skin to be reported. If you need to report a bite, call the Sheriff's Department at (828) 697-4912.
5. Contact the Health Department at (828) 692-4223. A nurse can talk with you about your exposure and help you decide if you need to get rabies vaccines.

## General rabies information

- Rabies is a 100% preventable disease that is caused by a virus.
- Contact with wild animals is the primary way that people, domestic animals and livestock are exposed to rabies.
- Wild mammals can transmit rabies even if they don't appear sick.
- The rabies virus is spread from the saliva of an infected animal, most often through biting or licking.
- Rabies is zoonotic, which means it can spread from animals to people.
- Rabies is nearly always fatal without proper post-exposure prophylaxis [treatment] (PEP).
- By avoiding contact with wild animals and stray animals and by taking simple precautions, you can greatly reduce the chance that you or your pets will be exposed to rabies and have to undergo medical treatment.

## North Carolina law and rabies

- To minimize health risks to human, NC law addresses what to do when a person is exposed or potentially exposed to rabies.
- The responsibilities of public health and animal control officials vary depending on the situation and on the level of health risk, but include the following components:
  - Mandatory reporting
  - Confinement of animals
  - In some cases, destruction of animals
- If a health care provider treats a person for an animal bite, the local health director must be notified within 24 hours.
- If a dog, cat or ferret bites a person; both the victim and the animal's owner must notify the local health director immediately.
- After any bite, the animal must be confined for 10 days, regardless of rabies vaccination status. The local health director decides the place of confinement which could be a veterinarian's office, a public or private animal shelter or even the owner's property. The owner is responsible for any costs related to the confinement.