

FAQs for Rabies Risk Assessment

Health Care Professionals and Providers

Determining Rabies Risk

What's the risk of rabies exposure within Alberta?

The risk of rabies exposure is very low in Alberta. Bats are the only reservoir species in the province. Rabies prevalence in bats is thought to be very low and distributed across the province. Other mammals can get bat variant rabies from exposure to bats or be imported to Alberta with rabies and pose an exposure risk, however these situations are rare in Alberta.

How do I determine if an animal exposure poses a risk for rabies?

A clinician tool has been created to help determine if an animal exposure poses a risk for rabies and should be reported to Environmental Public Health (EPH) for risk assessment. You can access the tool here: [Clinician Tool: Rabies Animal Exposure and Referrals Algorithm](#).

Detailed information on rabies risk is provided in the [Rabies Prevention & Control Manual](#).

What's the risk of rabies exposure from different types of animals in Alberta?

Bats pose the highest risk for rabies exposure. All other types of animals from Alberta are considered very low/negligible risk unless they have any of the following risk factors:

- Animals known to have been outside of Alberta within the past six months.
- Animals that are known to have been imported to Alberta within the past six months.
- Animals known to have been exposed to a bat within the past six months.
- Animals that appear unhealthy and/or are showing signs compatible with rabies.

What's the risk of rabies exposure from animals outside of Alberta?

The risk varies by location and species. Healthcare providers should report these exposures to EPH for risk assessment using the [Animal Exposure Notification Form](#).

What about the risk of rabies from travel-related exposure?

All exposures that occurred outside of Alberta should be reported to EPH for risk assessment.

What are the signs of rabies in animals?

Rabies can infect all warm-blooded mammals and presents with a variety of clinical signs. The most consistent signs include acute changes in behaviour and progressive paralysis. Rabies progresses rapidly and death occurs within 10 days of the onset of clinical signs. Detailed information can be found in the [Rabies Prevention & Control Manual](#). Patients should consult with their veterinarian about animal health concerns.

If a dog is aggressive, is this a sign of rabies?

Aggression in dogs can be normal behaviour. Dogs may show aggression and bite for many reasons (e.g., protecting their territory or their owner, or being fearful, rambunctious, in pain or stressed). A change in temperament or unusual behaviour for a specific dog can be a sign of rabies. For example, a normally friendly dog becomes aggressive or avoidant. Patients should consult with their veterinarian about animal concerns.

Why aren't we more concerned about rabies exposures from wildlife, strays or when the owner is unknown in Alberta?

Rabies in wildlife (excluding bats) and domestic animals within Alberta is extremely rare so bites from seemingly healthy animals are not considered to be a risk for rabies. People who are exposed to animals that appear unhealthy or are exhibiting unusual behaviour should still report the exposure to EPH for risk assessment regardless of the species involved.

Should an animal that has bitten a person be euthanized?

There is no public health requirement for animals involved in bites to humans to be euthanized. Euthanasia of owned domestic animals is at the discretion of the owner.

If the owner of an animal involved in a potential rabies exposure is considering euthanasia, they should consult with a veterinarian. If the animal is euthanized, the veterinarian is required to keep the animal carcass in storage until a risk assessment of the exposure can be conducted. If the risk of the exposure is deemed negligible for rabies, then the animal can be disposed. If the risk is assessed as medium or higher, the animal may need to be tested for rabies.

When to Report an Exposure to EPH

Do I need to report every animal exposure?

No. You can use the [Clinician Tool: Rabies Animal Exposure and Referrals Algorithm](#) to determine when an animal exposure should be reported to EPH and then complete the [Animal Exposure Notification Form](#).

Do I need to report all domestic dog bites to EPH?

No. Do not report all domestic dog bites to EPH. Use the [Clinician Tool: Rabies Animal Exposure and Referrals Algorithm](#) to determine if the dog bite should be reported to EPH. Dog bites can still be reported to local bylaw.

Do I need to ask patients to observe animals for 10 days?

Observation is only required if there is a known rabies risk factor. It's not typically needed for domestic animals. Use the [Clinician Tool: Rabies Animal Exposure and Referrals Algorithm](#) to determine if there is a risk factor that requires reporting to EPH.

Do I need to report dog bites from stray or unknown dogs in Alberta?

Typically, these don't need to be reported to EPH unless the animal had signs compatible with rabies. Being a stray does not change the rabies risk in Alberta.

What happens when the [Animal Exposure Notification Form](#) is submitted?

EPH will review completed [Animal Exposure Notification Forms](#) daily between 8:00 am - 4:30 pm. High risk exposures are prioritized.

How quickly will the patient be contacted by EPH?

High risk exposures are actioned within 24 hours. Medium risk exposures are actioned within 48 hours. If the exposure is deemed to be low/negligible risk, EPH will not reach out to the patient.

Clinical Management and Rabies Post Exposure Prophylaxis (rPEP)

When do I need to call the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) directly/urgently?

If you are at a site that has rPEP available and there is a high-risk exposure (bat, exposure during international travel, or exposure from animal with signs compatible with rabies), please call the MOH directly to support same encounter prophylaxis decisions.

If rPEP isn't available on site, what actions do I take?

Follow the guidance in the Connect Care Order Set which explains that you should provide clinical care, submit the [Animal Exposure Notification Form](#) (if applicable) and discharge the patient.

Patient Support and Follow-up

Where do I send patients who have questions about rabies?

- MyHealth: [Rabies](#)
- SHE Contact Centre: 1-833-476-4743
- For information about their pets/animals, patients should consult with a veterinarian.

Contact us at 1-833-476-4743 or [submit a request online](#) at [ahs.ca/eph](#).

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