

Howard County Health Department Rabies Surveillance Program

Rabies is a viral infection transmitted in the saliva of infected mammals. The virus enters the central nervous system of the host, and without treatment is almost always fatal.

The purpose of the Howard County Health Department's rabies surveillance program is to protect the public from the threat of rabies by way of the accurate and timely reporting, recording, communication and follow-up in response to bites sustained by humans from warm-blooded mammals.

Reporting: By law, all mammal to human bites must be reported as soon as possible after the incident has occurred. The majority of bite reports come from hospitals, clinics, police and sheriff's departments, the local Humane Society and schools. However, anyone can and should report a biting incident. To report an animal bite, call Joe Cross at the Howard County Health Department at 456-2406. If Mr. Cross is not in at the time that you call, please leave a clear message including addresses and phone numbers for the owner of the animal and the victim of the bite. Animal bites can also be reported in person at the Health Department office at 120 East Mulberry Street in Kokomo on the 2nd floor, Room 210, between the hours of 8 AM to 4 PM, Monday through Friday. *The date of the bite **must** be included in the report.*

Ten Day Confinement for Observation: Only dogs, cats and ferrets can be confined for ten day observation. The animal must be confined and observed for signs of illness for a period of ten days *regardless of the animal's vaccination status*. Rabies vaccinations are highly effective for these animals, but *does not* guarantee immunity against rabies. Pets can normally be confined and observed on their owner's property provided that an effective means is in place to keep them confined, such as a fenced yard, sturdy leash or chain, or a building from which they cannot escape. If the owner does not have adequate means to contain the animal, they can contact a local animal boarding facility.

If the dog, cat, or ferret is a stray, then the victim's family physician should be consulted and all circumstances considered regarding the necessity for rabies post-exposure treatment.

In rare cases, strict quarantine measures are necessary. For example, if a family pet is attacked by a wild animal, such as a raccoon or coyote and the biting animal escapes, then strict isolation can be enforced in which the pet is kept from all contact with other animals or humans* for a period of three months, (*with the exception of the person caring for the animal's basic needs.)

Wild Animals. If an animal is not a dog, cat or ferret or a domesticated farm animal, it is considered a wild animal. This is true regardless of whether the suspect animal is considered a pet by its owner. In wild animal bite cases the individual species is considered before deciding whether to euthanize the animal for rabies testing.

Farm Animals. Horses, cattle, pigs, sheep or goats are to be considered on a case by case basis. Quarantine measures are usually a non-issue for animals such as these.

Status of Rabies in Indiana. Presently, rabies is very rare in Indiana. Now and then Howard County has had a bat test positive for the virus. In southern Indiana there are occasional reports of a skunk or fox turning up positive. Nobody can be absolutely sure about when or where rabies will show up. Because the disease is so deadly, it is imperative that a well-documented rabies surveillance program be maintained. **For more information, follow link to [Indiana State Department of Health](http://www.in.gov/isdh/programs/rabies/rabies.htm). (link to <http://www.in.gov/isdh/programs/rabies/rabies.htm>)