



Animal Bites

What should you do if an animal bites you?

Rabies is a viral disease that affects warm-blooded animals, such as dogs, cats, skunks, foxes, raccoons, bats, etc. The virus is spread when saliva containing rabies virus is introduced into an opening in the skin, usually by the bite (or possibly scratch) of a rabid animal. You can also get rabies if the saliva from a rabid animal contacts any open wounds or the mucous membranes of your eyes, nose, or mouth.

If a bite occurs, the following precautions should be taken:

- Identify the animal. Most animals that have bitten a person must either be quarantined and observed for signs of rabies **or** tested for rabies. If the animal is to be tested, a qualified person should separate the animal's head from the body and submit the head (or whole body of a bat or small rodent) for laboratory testing.
- Immediately wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water, plus apply an iodine-based antiseptic, if available, as a first-aid procedure.
- Consult a physician as soon as possible to determine whether rabies postexposure treatment is needed. In addition, bite wounds can become infected. A physician will decide if you need antibiotics. You should also check with a physician about the need for a tetanus shot.



Who is in charge when an animal bites a person?

- All cities and counties in Texas **must** designate someone to handle animal bite cases. This person is called the Local Rabies Control Authority (LRCA).
- The LRCA is responsible for investigating animal bites, ensuring proper management of biting animals, and enforcing state and local rabies laws.



What happens to the animal that bites a person?

Dogs, cats, and ferrets (domestic): Regardless of vaccination status, the dog, cat, or ferret **must** be quarantined **or** euthanized (humanely killed). If euthanized, it must be tested for rabies. If the animal is to be quarantined, the time frame for the 10-day observation period begins at the time the bite occurred, even if the animal is not physically confined until sometime later. The LRCA might allow home confinement under certain conditions.

High-risk animals: Free-roaming skunks, bats, foxes, coyotes and raccoons **must** be euthanized and tested for rabies. As defined in Texas law, a free-roaming animal is one that is not in captivity or has been in captivity for less than 200 days immediately before the bite incident occurs. If a high-risk animal is not considered to be free-roaming, refer to Texas Administrative Code, Rabies Control and Eradication, for details on how to handle a bite incident.

Low-risk animals: Opossums, shrews, moles, squirrels, gophers, mice, rabbits, rats, and armadillos do not need to be quarantined or tested unless the LRCA has reason to suspect that the biting animal has rabies.

Other biting animals: All biting animals that are not categorized as dogs, cats, or domestic ferrets, free-roaming high-risk, or low-risk must either be euthanized and tested for rabies **or** quarantined or suitably confined as deemed appropriate by the LRCA for a 30-day observation period.

Note: If a biting animal is euthanized and needs to be tested, do not damage the brain. All the required portions of the brain must be submitted to the rabies laboratory for proper testing.



What is quarantine?

Quarantine means placing the animal in a facility that provides:

- (1) absolute security (no escape possible);
- (2) no contact with other animals or people except for contact necessary for its care; and
- (3) observation twice daily by a qualified person.

Quarantine **must** be in a quarantine facility licensed by the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) or a veterinary clinic operated by a veterinarian. In Texas rabies laws, a veterinarian is defined as a person licensed to practice veterinary medicine in the United States.

The DSHS is responsible for inspection of all rabies quarantine facilities; however, the LRCA is responsible for the proper handling and observation of all animals being quarantined.



What about home confinement?

According to state law, the LRCA **may** authorize home confinement if:

- (1) the biting animal was vaccinated against rabies and the time elapsed since the most recent vaccination has not exceeded the manufacturer's recommendations for the vaccine (if an unvaccinated animal is not over 4 months of age, it may be allowed home confinement);
- (2) the biting animal was not a stray at the time of the bite;
- (3) the home has an enclosure that will provide the required security and isolation;
- (4) the animal's custodian monitors the animal's behavior and health status and reports any changes to the LRCA right away; and
- (5) the LRCA or a veterinarian observes the animal at least on the first and last days of the home confinement.

Local policies may prohibit home confinement. Additionally, local ordinances may have more stringent requirements for home confinement, including more restrictive vaccination time intervals.

What if the animal gets sick or dies while in quarantine?

The animal should be examined by a veterinarian and if it is determined that it shows clinical signs of rabies, the animal must be euthanized and the head must be removed and tested for rabies. The bite victim should be notified if the animal develops clinical signs consistent with rabies so that consultation on rabies treatment can be obtained. If the animal dies, the head must be removed and tested for rabies.

Who pays for the quarantine?

The owner of the biting animal is required by state law to pay the cost of the quarantine.



What are the rabies vaccination requirements in Texas?

- Texas state law requires that pet owners have their dogs and cats vaccinated against rabies by 4 months of age. Based on the type of vaccine used, plus requirements established in state law and local ordinance, the veterinarian responsible for administering the vaccine will determine a vaccination schedule and issue a completed rabies vaccination certificate for each vaccinated animal. This certificate is considered an acceptable proof of vaccination; a rabies tag does not serve as proof of vaccination.
- Local ordinances may have more stringent requirements than state law about rabies vaccinations.
- Rabies vaccine for animals must be administered by a veterinarian or under the direct supervision of a veterinarian. Animal rabies vaccine can only be sold or distributed to veterinarians. Veterinarians cannot legally sell vaccine to their clients except for use in livestock if a veterinarian-client-patient relationship exists.

How can I help prevent animal bites?

- Do not approach or try to handle animals, including dogs and cats, that you do not know.

- Do not touch sick or injured animals. Call and report them to an animal control officer.
- Do not let your pets roam; keep them restrained. Train and socialize them so they are calm around people.
- Educate children about bite prevention. Children are the most common victims of severe dog bites.

