



Durham Region Health Department FAX about...

For Health Care Professionals



Rabies: Exposures to Humans and Post-Exposure Prophylaxis

Requirement to Report

Rabies is an infectious viral disease that affects the central nervous system of humans and other mammals. Although rare in Canada, once symptoms appear, rabies is nearly always fatal. In 2023 Durham Region Health Department (DRHD) conducted over 1540 rabies investigations and had over 160 requests for post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) from health care providers (HCP). Approximately 46% of those PEP requests were for wildlife exposures, 39% for dog exposures and 15% for incidents involving cats. Although wildlife had the most requests for PEP, 68% of all investigations were involving dogs. Rabies, if untreated, is a fatal disease.

Under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act*, Ontario Regulation 557 section 2(1) states:

A physician, registered nurse in the extended class, veterinarian, police officer or any other person who has information concerning **either or both of the following** shall, as soon as possible, notify the Medical Officer of Health and provide the Medical Officer of Health with the information, including the name and contact information of the exposed person, for:

- Any bite from a mammal
- Any contact with a mammal that is conducive to the potential transmission of rabies to persons

To report exposure with a bat, wild life, domestic animal or livestock please complete the [Animal Bite/Exposure Form](#) (durham.ca/hcp, under forms, reporting) and fax it to the confidential line at 905-666-1887. To speak with a public health inspector, please call Durham Health Connection Line at 905-668-2020 or 1-800-841-2729. After regular business hours (between 4:30 pm and 8:30 am), during weekends and holidays please call 1-800-372-1104 or 905-576-9991.

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905-668-2020 or 1-800-841-2729 | durham.ca/health

If you require this information in an accessible format, contact 1-800-841-2729.



Rabies post-exposure prophylaxis

Post-exposure prophylaxis should begin immediately following exposure to a wild terrestrial carnivore (such as a fox, skunk or raccoon) unless the animal is available for rabies testing and rabies is not considered likely.

- When there is a known **bat** bite, scratch or saliva exposure into a wound or mucous membrane, rabies PEP should be initiated immediately because of the higher prevalence of rabies in bats.
- This is particularly important when the exposure involves the face, neck or hands, or if the bat has attacked the person or hangs on tenaciously (indicating abnormal behaviour).
- If the bat is available for testing, PEP may be discontinued after consultation with a public health inspector and if the bat tests negative for rabies.

Post-exposure prophylaxis is **not recommended** if the bite or scratch involves a domestic animal such as a dog, cat or ferret **AND** the animal is available for a 10-day observation period by DRHD.

PEP of previously unimmunized individuals should consist of both Rabies Immune Globulin (Rablg) and rabies vaccine. For more information on recommendations for administration of PEP to both previously unimmunized and previously immunized individuals, please visit the [rabies post-exposure prophylaxis](#) section of our Health Care Provider webpage on durham.ca/hcp (under Tools and guidance documents).

To order rabies PEP, contact DRHD at 905-668-2020 or 1-800-841-2729 (ext. 4699) during regular business hours. After regular business hours (between 4:30 pm and 8:30 am), during weekends and holidays please call 1-800-372-1104 or 905-576-9991.

For more information on rabies, please visit durham.ca/rabies.

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