

**Infectious Disease Epidemiology Section
Office of Public Health,
Louisiana Department of Health
800-256-2748 (24 hr. number)
<http://infectiousdisease.ldh.la.gov>**

Protocol for Animal Control and Law Enforcement Agencies addressing animal bites and potential rabies exposures (August 28, 2019)

Introduction:

The Louisiana State Public Health Sanitary Code states, *“When any dog, cat, or ferret bites a human being, said animal shall be confined (as described in §113) for a minimum of 10 days following the bite, or said animal shall be killed and the head submitted immediately to a laboratory of the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals for examination for rabies...”*

Often, police officers and/or animal control personnel are required to decide on the means of compliance with the above stipulation, and to humanely euthanize the offending animal and prepare the head (brain) for submission to the state public health laboratory for analysis.

Procedure:

The first decision to be made is whether to enforce a ten-day observation period (or quarantine) or to euthanize the animal and submit the brain (head) for testing. The usual recommendation and the optimum mode of verifying rabies status is to...

- CONFINE THE ANIMAL (DOGS, CATS, AND FERRETS ONLY) FOR TEN DAYS (10 DAY OBSERVATION).
 - Why?
 - The observation is science based. If the animal is actively shedding rabies virus in the saliva, then the animal will begin to show neurological signs within the 10 day period. If not, the victim does not need to fear infection with rabies virus.
 - This process conserves limited state funds that are used for rabies testing.
 - The ten day observation period preserves the life of the animal and eliminates unnecessary euthanasia of animals.
 - NOTE: The ten day observation applies only to dogs, cats and ferrets. Wild animals that are common vector species for rabies transmission should be humanely euthanized and the brain (head) submitted for testing.

There are, however, situations when the ten day observation period cannot or should not be enforced and...

- THE ANIMAL SHOULD BE EUTHANIZED AND THE BRAIN (HEAD) SUBMITTED TO THE STATE PUBLIC HEALTH LABORATORY FOR ANALYSIS.
 - When?
 - The offending animal may be too vicious to keep under observation, and may pose a risk to caretakers.
 - Local vicious animal ordinances mandate euthanasia of the offending animal.
 - In cases where the bite wound is on the head or neck of the victim, the decision may be made to euthanize the animal to expedite test results and thus permit rapid determination of the need for rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (The State Public Health Veterinarian at the Department of Health can be consulted prior to making this decision...800-256-2748). The rabies vaccination status of the animal should be evaluated in making this decision.
 - Do local animal control and law enforcement authorities have the right to euthanize an animal prior to completion of the ten-day observation period, when the bite wound is on the head or neck of the victim?
 - The sanitary code states, *"...any animal that is suspected of being infected with rabies (whether or not it has bitten anyone), may be required by the state health officer or official state public health veterinarian, for the protection of the public health, to be killed and the head of such animal examined for rabies free of charge by a laboratory of the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals."*
 - Therefore, local animal control and law enforcement may request that the state public health veterinarian (800-256-2748) authorize euthanasia of the animal and submission of the brain (head) for rabies analysis.

It is always recommended to follow appropriate procedures for euthanasia of animals. Acceptable methods of euthanasia are listed and explained on the American Veterinary Medical Association Website (<https://www.avma.org/KB/Policies/Documents/euthanasia.pdf>). In some cases it may become necessary for police officers or animal control officers to utilize firearms when an animal, for public health purposes, must be killed so that the brain (head) can be submitted to the state public health laboratory.

- IT IS NOT APPROPRIATE TO TARGET THE HEAD OF THE ANIMAL WHEN DIAGNOSTIC SAMPLES OF BRAIN TISSUE ARE NEEDED FOR DIAGNOSIS OF RABIES!!!
 - The appropriate firearm should be selected for the situation. A gunshot to the heart or neck may be required.