

Appropriate Ten-Day Observation in Dogs, Cats or Ferrets That Have Bitten Human Beings in Louisiana

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Observation, or quarantine, of animals who have bitten a human being are guided by the following paragraph from the Louisiana Public Health Sanitary Code:

“Where confinement is required under the provisions of this Code (Title 51 Louisiana Administrative Code, Part III), the owner, veterinarian, animal shelter or other custodian of the animal shall confine said animal in a cage or in another manner such that the animal cannot contact any person or other animal. Tethering is not permitted.”

Several questions persistently arise regarding “confinement” of animals that have bitten people. Examples of questions:

1. Can all animals be observed for ten days to rule out rabies transmission?

The ten-day observation period is ONLY FOR DOGS, CATS, or FERRETS. Generally, all other warm-blooded mammals that bite humans, with the exception of small rodents and lagomorphs, should be euthanized and the brain submitted for rabies testing. Exotic animals and zoo animals may also require testing, but caretakers and animal control personnel should contact the State Public Health Veterinarian for recommendations based on individual circumstances.

2. Who determines whether observation must be in an animal shelter, a veterinary hospital or clinic, or in the owner’s home?

In Louisiana, decisions regarding the location of post-bite rabies observation (quarantine) are left to municipal or parish animal control agencies. In the absence of an animal control authority or agency, law enforcement or a local or parish representative of the Louisiana Department of Health should be consulted. Nevertheless, the Office of Public Health and the State Public Health Veterinarian promote certain guidelines in determining location of observation. Those guidelines are as follows:

- *Home observation should only be permitted if local animal control (when available) can confirm that the location of observation is secure and protects the general public from contact with the animal. The animal must be placed under scrupulous, continuous observation so that any incipient signs of rabies are readily detected. The animal must be isolated from the community. There should be no opportunity for additional*

exposures. Also some method to confirm the health of the animal at the conclusion of the observation period should be employed.

- *If the animal cannot be confined in a secure manner in the owner's home, or if there is no manner of confirming the health of the animal at the conclusion of the observation period, home observation should not be permitted.*
- *Home observation of dogs, cats or ferrets that have never been vaccinated with rabies vaccines is not recommended.*
- *Home observation is only recommended for animals that appear healthy at the time of the incident.*
- *Dangerously aggressive dogs, cats, or ferrets; animals with significant historical exposure to wildlife; or animals that are difficult to confine should never be considered for home observation.*

3. If a dog or cat is bitten by another animal, does the dog or cat have to be observed for ten days?

No. Ten-day observation or quarantine is only required for the animal (dog, cat or ferret) that bites or otherwise exposes a human. Rabid dogs, cats, or ferrets that bite will become severely ill within the ten-day observation period, if this biting animal was shedding rabies at the time of the bite. Longer periods of observation may be required when a dog, cat, or ferret is bitten by a wild animal or an unknown domestic pet. The State Public Health Veterinarian should be consulted for recommendations of observation for animals that have been bitten or scratched by known rabid wild animal or other animals that potentially could transmit rabies.

4. Exactly when is “observation” required?

- *Observation is required whenever a dog, cat or ferret bites a human, or when the same species otherwise causes an injury to humans where rabies virus could potentially be transmitted through salivary contamination of the wound.*
- *Observation or quarantine, but for longer periods than ten days, is also required when a dog, cat or ferret is bitten by a rabid animal. Note: Observation may also be suggested for dogs, cats or ferrets that are bitten by wild animals where rabies is not confirmed, but is suspected. Please consult with the State Public Health Veterinarian for recommendations.*

5. Do “well vaccinated” dogs, cats or ferrets still require observation?

The public health sanitary code does not include consideration of vaccine status in dogs, cats, or ferrets that bite humans. Animal control and public health authorities may, however, consider vaccine history in determining the approval of observation type (i.e. home observation).

6. What does it mean to be “well vaccinated” for rabies?

A history of having received rabies vaccination does not ensure absolute protection from infection. Individual immune systems respond differently to vaccines. Also, rare inconsistencies in manufacture, storage, or handling can compromise a vaccine's potency prior to administration. Finally, errors in administration of the vaccine (e.g., intradermal rather than subcutaneous administration) can affect the potency of the vaccine.

Nevertheless, failures of rabies vaccine efficacy are rare (four reported in the United States from 2004 to 2007). Apparent break-through cases of rabies in vaccinated dogs occur in animals that are young (<12 months of age) and have received only one vaccine dose. Other cases have occurred due to the vaccine not being given according to label instructions (protracted period of time between initial vaccination and boosters) or from having received vaccination in lots that had been recalled due to questions of potency.

7. What information should be collected by the animal control agency, law enforcement agency, or other entity overseeing the observation period?

- *Complete name, address, zip code, and telephone number of the owner of the biting animal*
- *The name of any other person who will exercise control over or have authorized contact with the animal if it is placed in isolation (observation or quarantine). Such persons could include a veterinarian, if the animal is to be isolated in a veterinary hospital, or an extended family member, if home observation is allowed at a private dwelling other than the animal's residence of record*
- *Species, breed, age, sex, and description of the biting animal*
- *Rabies vaccination history (lifelong history); date of vaccination, type and lot number of vaccine given and name of the vaccinating veterinarian. Vaccination history must be verified by original rabies vaccination certificates or veterinary clinic records. The description of the animal as stated on the vaccination certificate should be cross-checked to confirm that the certificate represents the implicated biting animal.*
- *Pet license number, year of issue, and issuing agency, parish, municipality, or veterinary hospital.*
- *Owner's statement regarding the circumstances of the bite. It should be noted, however, that the owner is frequently not the person who observed the bite incident. Independent testimonies from other knowledgeable witnesses should also be sought.*
- *Health status of the biting animal. Ideally, all implicated biting animals should be examined by a licensed veterinarian. Practical constraints of the investigation, however, often limit the health assessment to the investigator's personal observation of the animal's current condition and the owner's testimony of the animal's recent health history.*
- *Known, suspected, or possible contacts with other animals, including wildlife, at or away from home during the preceding six months*

- *Adequacy of the owner’s facilities to provide isolation of the animal for the required observation (quarantine) period, if home observation is being considered as an option*
- *Owner’s attitude toward, understanding of, and probable compliance with the conditions of home observation. Accurate appraisal of the owner’s cooperation is critical toward whether home observation should be permitted*

Note: Any and all information collected during an animal bite investigation may be subject to subpoena if legal action is pursued. For this reason, investigators should take care to record information in a manner that is accurate, complete, consistent, and legible.

8. When observation is conducted in an animal shelter or veterinary hospital or clinic, what manner of confinement is recommended?

- *The facility must offer secure individual housing in which the animal can be isolated from other animals and restricted in its contact with people. Again, there should be absolutely no contact with other animals.*
- *The staff should be trained to be aware of the objectives of observation and professionally responsible for ensuring that the conditions of the secure isolation are maintained.*
- *Veterinarians are skilled to monitor and to recognize possibly subtle neurologic signs that could indicate the onset of clinical rabies. Animal control personnel should also be trained to recognize these signs.*
- *Signs indicating that the animal is currently under rabies observation or quarantine should be posted prominently on the entrance to the enclosure.*
- *Interaction with the animal should be restricted to the fewest experienced and responsible staff necessary for its feeding and care.*
- *Animal control personnel caring for animals under rabies observation, ideally should be appropriately vaccinated against rabies (pre-exposure prophylaxis).*

9. What legal documentation should be utilized when home observation is authorized?

- *When home quarantine is authorized, the owner or responsible party should sign a quarantine order (See Model Quarantine Order at <http://www.ldh.la.gov/assets/oph/Center-PHCH/Center-CH/infectious-epi/VetInfo/Rabies/ModelQuarantineOrder.pdf>) affirming that he/she will quarantine the animal in a secure location, report immediately to the investigating agency any signs of illness or abnormal behavior that may develop, and assume all liability for the quarantine (including patient medical care if additional exposures occur during quarantine).*

10. What constitutes a secure location in the home?

- *A “secure location” is defined as being inside the owner’s home or in a well fenced-in and secure area outdoors. The area in which the animal is enclosed should preclude contact with other pets in the home, other people and pets in the neighborhood or community, and wild animals.*

11. Who should be permitted to contact the animal in the home?

- *Persons who have contact with the animal should be limited to the minimum number (ideally, one) of responsible adults necessary to tend to the feeding and care of the animal during quarantine.*

12. Can the animal be removed from the quarantine or observation area?

- *A dog may be “walked” on a secure leash to defecate or urinate if the area of relief is in a fenced in or otherwise secure area. The animal cannot be permitted to intermingle in any way with other animals or people.*
- *At no time should the animal be removed from the quarantine area, except as explained above, without first notifying and receiving permission from the local rabies control authority (animal control agency, law enforcement, or health official).*

13. What changes in health status or behavior should be reported to the agency overseeing home observation of the animal (e.g. animal control, law enforcement, parish or municipal health authority)?

- *Any changes in the animal’s health or behavior should be reported and should prompt an evaluation by a veterinarian or animal control authority trained to recognize signs of rabies. Ultimately a veterinarian should be consulted.*
- *Local or parish animal control agencies that do not have a veterinarian on staff should establish a relationship with a local veterinary practice to provide services for examination and evaluation of animals under rabies observation.*
- *The initial signs of rabies can be variable, insidious, and non-specific. While observations of large numbers of rabid animals have yielded composite descriptions of typical rabies cases in domestic species, there can be considerable variability in the number, severity, and sequence of signs across individuals. The initial signs of rabies in nearly all animals are more likely to be subtle, sporadic alterations in behavior or temperament than overt neuromuscular dysfunction. For some rabid animals, the first and only sign is sudden death. Observation of any of the following signs in an animal under rabies quarantine should prompt an immediate evaluation by the veterinarian:*
 - *Withdrawal from and resistance to contact; seeking seclusion*
 - *Wide-eyed; reduced frequency or absence of blinking; dilated pupils; photophobia; and exaggerated, often aggressive, response to tactile, visual, or auditory stimuli*
 - *Snapping/ biting at imaginary objects*
 - *Pica (eating or mouthing sticks, stones, soil, clothing, feces, etc.)*
 - *Aggressively attacking inanimate objects*
 - *Sexual excitement with unusual attempts to mount inanimate objects*
 - *Compulsive running or circling, often to the point of exhaustion*
 - *Obsessive licking, biting, or scratching at the site of viral inoculation*

- *Dropped jaw, inability to swallow, excessive salivation*
 - *Change in tone, timbre, frequency, or volume of vocalizations*
 - *Flaccid or deviated tail or penis*
 - *Tenesmus (due to paralysis of the anal sphincter)*
 - *Muscular tremors*
 - *Acute onset of mono-, para-, or quadri-paresis; lameness*
 - *Abnormal, exaggerated gait; ataxia and incoordination*
 - *Convulsive seizures*
 - *Paralysis, prostration, recumbency*
 - *Death*
- *If after examining the animal the veterinarian determines that these, or any other signs of illness, are suggestive of rabies, the agency overseeing observation should immediately take custody of the animal (if an on-premises observation), safely and humanely euthanize it, and remove and submit the brain to the Office of Public Health Laboratory for testing.*

14. What are the procedures at the conclusion of the observation period?

- *At the end of the observation period, a representative of the agency overseeing observation should examine the animal to confirm the animal is healthy and free of signs of rabies. This representative should be a veterinarian or a trained animal control officer. If healthy, the animal may be released from confinement.*

*Animals with very good vaccination histories that have been confined in the home, may be released from confinement upon verbal confirmation by the owner of the animal's health. If the animal is not currently vaccinated against rabies, **a rabies vaccine should be administered prior to release from confinement.** All persons who were bitten or who were otherwise exposed to the animal should be informed that the animal is healthy and there is no possibility of rabies virus transmission.*

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