

Evaluating Human Rabies Risk from Animal Bites: Domestic Dogs, Cats & Ferrets

North Carolina Communicable Disease Branch – Veterinary Public Health Program



For additional information, contact your local health department, or:
N.C. Communicable Disease Branch, 919-733-3419 (24/7)

<http://epi.publichealth.nc.gov>

What constitutes a rabies exposure?

An exposure is any penetration of skin by the teeth of a potentially rabid animal or contamination of scratches, abrasions, open wounds or mucous membranes with saliva or other potentially infectious material (such as brain or nervous tissue) from a potentially rabid animal.

Questions to ask:

- When and where (location) did the exposure occur?
- What was the source animal species? Was the cat, dog or ferret owned, stray or feral?
- Can the exposed person positively identify the source animal?
- Is the source animal available for capture and assessment? If so, has Animal Control been contacted?
- What were the circumstances of the exposure: Provoked or unprovoked? Unusual behavior, sick/wounded animal?
- Was there exposure to rabies virus as defined above? **If so, exposed person should contact a healthcare provider.**

Is post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) needed?

