

Animal Rabies Vaccination:

Certified Rabies Vaccinator (CRV) Program - Guidance for Local Health Directors

Background

Rabies vaccination of dogs, cats and ferrets is an effective public health intervention to protect pets from contracting rabies from wildlife and, therefore, to prevent transmission of rabies, a fatal zoonotic disease, to people. In North Carolina, rabies vaccination of dogs was mandated by law decades ago. Since 1983, cats are required to have current rabies vaccinations; ferrets were added to the mandate in 2009. North Carolina General Statute 130A-185 requires owned dogs, cats and ferrets 4 months of age and older to be *currently* vaccinated against rabies. “Current vaccination” means the animal should have a booster within one year of the first vaccine, and thereafter every one, three or four years, depending on the animal species and type of vaccine used for the booster.

At a time when many counties were without veterinarians to provide the required rabies vaccinations, the Certified Rabies Vaccinator program was established by law (NCGS 130A-186) to enhance public health rabies vaccination programs *in counties where no veterinarians were available* to provide this service.

The CRV program is popular with many local health directors. According to NCGS 130A-186, CRVs may administer rabies vaccine under specific criteria in rabies vaccination clinics and programs in the county in which they are appointed. **Rabies vaccines administered by CRVs, regardless of manufacturer, are valid for only one year from the date of vaccination according to the N.C. Administrative Code (10A NCAC 41G .0101).** In many jurisdictions, dogs, cats and ferrets that complete their holding period are vaccinated by CRVs prior to adoption at shelters, ensuring that these animals receive at least one rabies vaccination in their lifetime.

Rabies Vaccination recommendations are published in the national guidance document, [Compendium of Rabies Prevention and Control](#) which is produced by the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians (NASPHV).

General Considerations Regarding Vaccination of Animals

Vaccination is a potent medical procedure with both risks and benefits. Several factors contributed to decisions in North Carolina and other states to allow lay persons, not formally trained in veterinary medicine, to administer rabies vaccines to animals under specified circumstances. Some of these factors are zoonotic transmission of rabies, a nearly 100 percent fatality rate associated with the disease, rabies epizootics in wildlife in areas with inadequate veterinary services and support of public health programs.

Adverse events: Adverse events may occur with any vaccination. The following events have been reported associated with rabies vaccinations: acute hypersensitivity (59%), local reactions (27%), systemic reactions (including short-term lethargy, fever, general pain, anorexia, or behavior changes with or without gastrointestinal disturbances) (9%), autoimmune disorders (3%), and other (2%). (Frana TS, Clough NE, et al. Post marketing

surveillance of rabies vaccines for dogs to evaluate safety and efficacy. *J Am Vet Med Assoc*, 2008;232:1000-1002.)

Adverse vaccine events in animals should be reported to the USDA APHIS; see the APHIS web site at https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/veterinary-biologics/adverse-event-reporting/ct_vb_adverse_event

NC Veterinary Public Health recommends that Local Health Directors contract with licensed veterinarians in their jurisdictions to assist with the practical portion of CRV training.

Some of the advantages of contracting with a licensed veterinarian for practical training are:

- A local veterinarian is available to train and develop CRV competencies in rabies vaccination procedures.
- It is important to have a licensed veterinarian present at public health rabies clinics to provide 3- or 4-year vaccine boosters for previously vaccinated privately owned animals (as evidenced by a prior rabies certificate). CRV vaccinations are only valid for one year, regardless of the labeled duration of the vaccine.
- A licensed veterinarian is available for consultation and to ensure veterinary care in the event of an adverse reaction.

(Guidelines not required in statutes or rules are strongly recommended, not mandated.)

Appointment of Certified Rabies Vaccinator by the Local Health Director

Per NCGS 130A-186, the local health director (LHD) shall appoint one or more CRV to vaccinate dogs, cats and ferrets in their jurisdiction where licensed veterinarians are not available to participate in all scheduled county rabies control clinics, and/or to participate in the county rabies control program. Once appointed, the CRV must receive training from the state public health veterinarians, or a veterinarian designee, who must certify in writing that the CRV satisfactorily completed the training. The LHD should send the appointment directly to one of the public health veterinarians on the local health department letterhead or via the LHD's email.

Supervision of Certified Rabies Vaccinators by the Local Health Director

The authority for a CRV to administer rabies vaccinations is derived from the LHD. Even though the CRV's direct supervisor may not be the LHD, the LHD should have supervisory authority pertaining to rabies vaccination procedures and associated responsibilities performed by their appointees. The following are recommendations:

- A certification letter from the state public health veterinarian is required for each appointed CRV to vaccinate in the jurisdiction and shall be maintained on file for each CRV appointed by the LHD.
- The LHD should provide written documentation for and keep on file the following:
 - Approved location(s) where the CRV may vaccinate within the jurisdiction (*i.e.*, shelter name and address);
 - Direct supervisor for the CRV; and
 - Special conditions for vaccination for each CRV (*i.e.*, may vaccinate at rabies clinics only while a licensed veterinarian is present).

- Employee reviews for each appointed CRV should include, minimally, evaluation of safe and effective animal handling; proper storage, handling and administration of rabies vaccine; handling of sharps; and proper completion of rabies certificates.
- If the CRV has *not* performed his or her duties effectively and appropriately, then the LHD may:
 - require remedial training under the direct supervision of a veterinarian on those aspects of deficiency to the satisfaction of the veterinarian; or
 - require recertification by the state public health veterinarians; or
 - terminate the appointment.

Job Duties and Limitations of Certified Rabies Vaccinators

- Statute defines the minimal job functions for CRVs:
 - Acquisition of rabies vaccine.
 - Appropriate storage of rabies vaccine.
 - Appropriate administration of rabies vaccine to dogs, cats, and ferrets. All rabies vaccines administered by a CRV, regardless of label, shall expire one year from the date of administration.
 - To supply a rabies tag and completed rabies vaccination certificate (NASPHV form 51) for each vaccinated animal.
- It is recommended, though not required, that CRVs administer rabies vaccine only under the direct supervision of a shelter director/manager or veterinarian licensed in NC when vaccinating shelter animals.
- For privately owned animals, typically at rabies vaccination clinics, it is recommended that CRVs perform vaccinations only while a licensed veterinarian is present at the clinic vaccinating animals. Ideally, veterinarians licensed in NC should administer rabies vaccine to privately owned animals. This assures that a professional veterinarian is available to vaccinate previously vaccinated dogs and cats with three- and four-year vaccines, as appropriate for the vaccine selected. Also, in the event of an adverse vaccine reaction, a veterinary medical professional is available to address medical needs.

CRV Training Requirements and Recommendations

Statute requires that the state public health veterinarians provide a minimum of four (4) hours of training for appointed certified rabies vaccinators.

The state public health veterinarians' recommended training includes:

- I. Classroom training by one of the state public health veterinarians.
 - Familiarity with and access to current North Carolina General Statutes and rules related to rabies:
 - a. Chapter 130A Article 6. Communicable Diseases, Part 6. Rabies; and
 - b. 10A NCAC 41G .0101 Time of Rabies Vaccination.
 - Familiarity with N.C. Department of Environmental Quality Medical Waste Management Rules regarding the handling and disposal of sharps: <https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/waste-management/medical-waste>

- A working knowledge of and access to the most current publication of the [Compendium of Rabies Prevention and Control](#).
- II. A passing grade on a written test that measures knowledge of classroom training material
 - III. Practical training and assessment of animal handling; vaccine handling, storage and administration; proper handling and disposal of sharps; proper completion of rabies certificates and issuance of rabies tags; and proper documentations in animal's record. Practical training shall be done by one of the state public health veterinarians or a N.C.-licensed veterinarian prequalified by one of the state public health veterinarians and approved by the LHD in the appointing jurisdiction.
 - IV. Annual re-evaluations of the same areas tested on in III above.

Termination of a Certified Rabies Vaccinator

The local health director shall have the authority to terminate a certified rabies vaccinator in his/her county.