WEST VIRGINIA DIVISION OF INFECTIOUS DISEASE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE (DIDPR)

Rabies Risk Assessment for Human Exposure to Animals

Revised 10/8/26 | Start PEP | Consultation | No further action

STEP 1 **Determine if exposure[b] occurred:** Bite or scratch? Saliva or central nervous system material in mucous membrane or wound? Contact with a bat[a]?

- No → **No further action**
- Yes

STEP 2 **Determine type of animal involved** (non-mammal = no rabies risk). **All animal bites and potential rabies exposures must be reported to the Local Health Department (LHD) within 24 hours.**

Bats, skunks, raccoons, foxes, or other wild carnivores

Is animal available for testing?

- **NO** → **Start PEP[b]**
- **YES** → **Submit for testing.** Contact LHD[c] to coordinate shipment to WV Office of Laboratory Services.
  - TEST RESULT
    - Negative: no further action
    - **Positive or indeterminate: Start PEP**

Rodents and rabbits

With the exception of unusual circumstances*, rodents and rabbits are **NOT** considered likely to transmit rabies and do **NOT** need to be tested.

*Larger rodents are more likely to test positive for rabies (i.e. groundhogs, beavers). Rodents or rabbits with acute neurological signs (per veterinarian), animals from rabies endemic areas, and pet rodents/rabbits housed outside can be considered for testing.

Cats, dogs, and ferrets in U.S.[e]

Is animal available for testing or quarantine?

- **NO** → **Attempt to locate the animal; report to animal control.** Assess circumstances to determine need for PEP:
  1. Circumstances of exposure (provoked?)
  2. Exposure type (bite?)
  3. Behavior of animal (normal?)
  4. Vaccination status of animal
  5. Local rabies prevalence
  6. Location of bite on body[g] (hand? face?)

  → **Consultation[d]**
- **YES** → **Withhold PEP for 10 days** for quarantine.
  - **HEALTHY AT 10 DAYS** → PEP not needed.
  - **SICK OR DEAD** → **Test** the animal.
    - Negative: no further action
    - **Positive or indeterminate: Start PEP**

Monkeys and other exotic mammals

Herpes B is more of a concern for macaque monkeys than rabies. Other exotic animals are a potential risk.

→ **Consultation[d]**

Livestock[f]

Is animal available for testing or quarantine?

- **NO** → **Consultation[d]**
- **YES** → **Withhold PEP for 14 days** for quarantine.
  - **HEALTHY AT 14 DAYS** → No further action.
  - **SICK OR DEAD** → **Test the brain.**
    - Negative: no further action
    - **Positive: Start PEP**

[a] PEP should be considered when direct contact between a human and a bat has occurred unless the exposed person is an adult and can be certain that a bite, scratch, or mucous membrane exposure did not occur. Persons who awaken to find a bat in their bedroom, persons with mental impairment, and children who are found playing unsupervised in a room with a bat should be considered for PEP.

[b] Exposure is a bite or mucous membrane contact with CNS tissue/fluids from a mammal.

[c] There is no quarantine period established for wild animals; therefore, PEP or testing the brain of the animal involved are the only appropriate measures if an exposure occurs.

[d] Public health consultation is recommended. Contact your local health department or DIDPR at (304) 558-5358. For potential Herpes B exposure, contact the Zoonotic Disease Program **IMMEDIATELY** at (304) 558-5358.

[e] Canine-strain rabies is not found in the United States but is very common in other parts of the world. It is important to ask for travel history when assessing exposure.

[f] The West Virginia Department of Agriculture, Office of the State Veterinarian should be notified immediately of any livestock testing positive for rabies (304-558-2214).

[g] Bites closer to the head have a shorter path to the brain and less time before rabies symptoms can occur, thus PEP should be strongly considered.

PLEASE NOTE: THIS RISK ASSESSMENT GUIDE IS NOT INTENDED TO ADDRESS ALL POTENTIAL RABIES EXPOSURES NOR SHOULD ALL DECISIONS BE BASED SOLELY ON THE ABOVE INFORMATION.