

# Allegheny County Health Department

## **DIRECTOR**

Bruce W. Dixon, M.D.

**3441 Forbes Avenue  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15213**

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**Dear Emergency Room Director:**

**The Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD) is continuing to receive frequent reports of animal bites, many of which involve people. To date this year, more than 340 wild and domestic animals have been tested for rabies in the Allegheny County Public Health Laboratory. As you know, rabies is a viral disease most often transmitted through the bite of an infected animal. The disease can also be transmitted through a scratch, abrasion or mucous membrane exposure to infectious saliva of a diseased animal. Human rabies, if untreated, is virtually always fatal.**

**Of the animals tested, 5 were positive for rabies. It is particularly significant that the positives included 2 cats and 1 dog, in addition to 4 raccoons and 2 bats. All 3 of the domestic animals involved human exposures requiring rabies shots for the exposed persons. (An exposure includes a bite, scratch or mucous membrane contact.)**

**Enclosed for your reference are copies of the ACHD Rabies Exposure Protocol Summary. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call either of us at (412) 578-8062. On weekends, evenings, and holidays, a Health Department representative can be reached at (412) 687-ACHD (2243).**

**We very much value and appreciate your cooperation and assistance in safeguarding the health of Allegheny County residents.**

**Sincerely,**

**Joan E. McMahon, RN, MPH**

**Ihsan Chaudry, DV M, MPH**

**JEMcM:jsm Enclosures**

## ALLEGHENY COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT (ACHD)

### RABIES EXPOSURE PROTOCOL SUMMARY

#### DETERMINATION FOR POST EXPOSURE TREATMENT WITH RABIES BIOLOGICS IS MADE BASED ON THE FOLLOWING:

A. Assessment of exposure including whether or not there has been a bite, scratch or other saliva exposure (e.g., handling the animal with cuts on hands, without gloves)

B. HIGH RISK ANIMALS (e.g., RACCOONS, BATS, FOXES, SKUNKS AND GROUND HOGS)

1. If the RACCOON, FOX, SKUNK or GROUND HOG is available, it should be tested immediately for rabies. Post exposure rabies immunization may be delayed until the test result is available, usually within 24 hours. If the wild animal is not available for testing, complete prophylaxis, including Human Rabies Immune Globulin (HRIG) and Human Diploid Cell Vaccine (HDCV), is indicated.

THE FEDERAL CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION (CDC) APPROVED RABIES POST-EXPOSURE PROTOCOL IS:

1. HUMAN RABIES IMMUNE GLOBULIN (HRIG). Given for ALL exposures. Dosage determined by person's weight. ONE TIME dose is given with first dose of human diploid cell vaccine (HDCV).
2. HUMAN DIPLOID CELL VACCINE (HDCV) a series of five (5) intramuscular (IM) injections given on days 0 - 3 - 7- 14 and 28.

2. Rabies post-exposure prophylaxis is recommended for all persons with bite, scratch, or mucous membrane exposure to a BAT, unless the BAT is available for testing and is found to be negative for rabies. Post-exposure prophylaxis may be appropriate even in the absence of demonstrable bite, scratch or mucous membrane exposure, in situations in which there is reasonable probability that such exposure may have occurred (e.g., a sleeping individual awakes to find a BAT in the room, an adult witnesses a BAT in the room with a previously unattended child, mentally challenged person, intoxicated individual, etc.

C. DOMESTIC ANIMALS (e.g., DOGS, CATS or FERRETS)

1. If the domestic animal is healthy and available it may be observed for ten (10) days from the date of the bite. If the animal remains healthy for the observation period, prophylaxis with rabies vaccine is not necessary.
2. If the domestic animal is sickly or unusually aggressive, it should be euthanized and tested for rabies. Decision to give rabies vaccine may be delayed until the test result is available, usually within 24 hours.

IF A STRAY ANIMAL CANNOT BE LOCATED AND CAPTURED WITHIN 48 HOURS FROM THE TIME OF THE EXPOSURE, (12 HOURS IN THE CASE OF A HEAD OR NECK EXPOSURE), RABIES PROPHYLAXIS SHOULD BEGIN IMMEDIATELY AND CONTINUE FOR THE FULL COURSE UNTIL AND UNLESS THE ANIMAL IS FOUND; TESTED, AND DETERMINED TO BE NEGATIVE FOR RABIES.

- D. • LOW RISK ANIMALS (e.g., HAMSTERS, GERBILS, CHIPMUNKS, SQUIRRELS, GUINEA PIGS, RATS, MICE AND RABBITS), are rarely found to be infected with rabies. These animals are not known to cause human rabies infections in the United States. Their bites or scratches almost never call for anti-rabies treatment.

UPON VALIDATING AN EXPOSURE, THE ACHD REFERS THE VICTIM TO HIS/HER PHYSICIAN/HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM FOR TREATMENT OF THE WOUND, POSSIBLE TETANUS BOOSTER, AND POST EXPOSURE RABIES VACCINATION.

ACHD INFECTIOUS DISEASES STAFF IS AVAILABLE FOR CONSULTATION ON A 24 HOURS BASIS, DURING BUSINESS HOURS AT (412) 578-8060 AND ON EVENINGS, WEEKENDS AND HOLIDAYS, AT (412) 687-ACHD (2243).