

Rabies is a fatal viral disease that affects humans and other mammals. People get rabies from the bite or scratch of an animal with rabies. People can also be exposed to the virus when saliva from an infected animal gets into a cut or open wound, or a person's eyes, nose, or mouth. [By law](#), all cats, dogs and ferrets in Vermont must receive regular rabies shots. Owners of all domestic dogs and wolf-hybrids more than 6 months old must also license the animal in their town clerk's office.

Animal Bite Reporting

Health care providers are required to report the name, age and address of any person who has been bitten by an animal that could be subject to rabies to the Town Health Officer (THO) within 24 hours. In cases where the person who has been bitten does not see a health care provider, they may report the bite to the THO. The reporting requirements are in section 7.0 of the [Reportable and Communicable Diseases Rule](#) (see section 9).

Animal Bite Investigation

When THOs receive a verbal or written report (e.g. [Animal Bite Report Form](#)) that a dog, cat, or ferret has bitten a human, the THO must:

1. Contact the bite victim and the owner of the animal to investigate the incident.
2. Determine the animal's rabies vaccination status. If the animal is overdue or unvaccinated for rabies, require that the animal receives rabies vaccination and town licensing after the following the bite confinement period.
3. Require the animal to be confined and observed for 10 days **regardless of rabies vaccination status**. The confinement period can take place at the residence of the animal's owner so long as the animal is not able to escape or bite anyone during the 10 days. Instruct the owner to call you and contact their vet if the animal becomes ill or dies during this period.
4. After the 10-day confinement is over, confirm that the animal is healthy and notify the bite victim that the animal monitoring period is complete. Rabies postexposure shots for the bite victim are not needed during the animal confinement period.
5. Complete the [Animal Bite Report Form](#) and file with town records. You do not need to send bite reports to the Health Department.

KEY POINTS

- **THOs must investigate animal bites**
- **Regardless of rabies vaccination status, THOs must require that the biting animal be confined**
- **THOs must complete the Animal Bite Report Form and file with town records**

Animal Confinement

The confinement and observation period may be carried out at the residence of the animal's owner so long as the animal is not able to escape, bite or expose anyone during the 10 days. If the THO feels that the owner will not be able to confine the animal appropriately, the animal can be confined in a facility at the owner's expense.

The owner must report any illness in the animal to the THO immediately. At the end of the 10-day confinement period, the THO must follow up with the animal's owner to verify that the animal is healthy and inform the person who was bitten of the health status of the animal.

Call the Health Department at 802-863-7240 with any questions regarding domestic animal bite confinement. The THO should file the completed [Animal Bite Report Form](#) with town records.

Movement of Animal During Bite Confinement Period

As required in section 9 of the [Reportable and Communicable Diseases Rule](#), the animal should not be moved into another jurisdiction during the bite confinement period without the approval of that jurisdiction's Health Officer and the Vermont Department of Health.

Dog-on-Dog Bites

There is no guidance in the state's [Reportable and Communicable Disease Rule](#) about confinement for bites between dogs. The Health Department recommends that the owner seek veterinary care for their bitten dog to address any wounds. A dog without or overdue for rabies vaccination must be vaccinated and licensed with the town per state law. Domestic animal public nuisance/safety concerns and enforcement are handled by individual town ordinances.

Rabies Testing

Following the death of an animal that is suspected of having rabies, including domestic animals that die or are euthanized during a 10-day confinement, the remains (i.e. the head of the animal) should be submitted by veterinarians (for domestic animals) or state game wardens (for wild animals) to the Health Department Laboratory for rabies testing.

If a THO is requested to assist in this process, they should first contact the Health Department at 802-863-7240 or toll-free at 800-640-4374 for direction on how to proceed.

Rabies Hotline:
1-800-4-RABIES
(1-800-472-2437)

Contacts and Additional Resources:

Please watch [this webinar](#) to learn more about the roles and responsibilities of THOs in responding to animal bites/rabies concerns.

Questions about domestic animal rabies vaccination requirements and importation may be directed to the Vermont Agency of Agriculture's Animal Health Office at (802) 828-2421.

Animal Bites and Rabies Testing

For questions about possible human exposure to rabies, pet exposure to rabies, and rabies testing (including sample submission logistics), call the Rabies Hotline at 1-800-4-RABIES (1-800-472-2437), or the Health Department at 802-383-8068, Option 7.

Additional resources concerning rabies or rabies testing:

- Vermont Department of Health: 802-863-7240 or 800-640-4374 (toll-free)
- Vermont Rabies Hotline/USDA Wildlife Services: 800-4-RABIES (800-472-2437)
- Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, Animal Health Section (for livestock): 802-828-2421
- Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife Game Wardens: 802-828-1529
- Local animal control officers: contact the local town office
- Local State Police barracks
- Health Department Rabies website: healthvermont.gov/disease-control/zoonotic-diseases/rabies
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website: cdc.gov/rabies