

**To:** Vermont Health Care Providers and Health Care Facilities  
**Date:** August 14, 2025  
**From:** Natalie Kwit, DVM, MPH, DACVPM, State Public Health Veterinarian

## **Rabies Postexposure Prophylaxis (rPEP): Use It Wisely**

### **Background**

Animal rabies cases are rising in Vermont. So far in 2025, **36 animals** have tested positive – mainly raccoons, bats, skunks, and foxes. Most cases are in **Orleans, Chittenden, and Franklin Counties**, but have been reported throughout the state.

Rabies spreads to humans mainly through animal bites. Wild animals (raccoons, skunks, foxes, bats, woodchucks) are the main sources. Rodents (squirrels, mice, rabbits) are rarely rabid and have not transmitted rabies to humans. Contact with urine, feces, or fur does not spread rabies.

**Rabies is fatal to humans if medical care is not given before symptoms start, but rabies postexposure prophylaxis (rPEP) is costly, complex, and in limited supply.**

### **Requested Actions**

**1. Call the Health Department before you treat.**

- If you are unsure about giving rPEP, call the Health Department 24/7 at 802-863-7240 (Option 2).
- Patients can call 1-800-4-RABIES (1-800-472-2437) for advice about exposures.

**2. Give rPEP only when needed.** rPEP is recommended when:

- The person is bitten on the head, face, or neck by a wild animal (even if the animal is available for testing)
- A bat is found in the same room as a sleeping person or young child, and the bat can't be tested.
- The person is bitten or scratched by a raccoon, skunk, fox, bat, or woodchuck, and the animal is not available for testing.
- The person is bitten by a strange-acting dog or cat that can't be observed or tested.

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3. **Delay rPEP if information is coming soon.** Rabies symptoms take weeks to months to appear, so brief delays (i.e., days) are safe when:
  - The animal is being observed for 10 days (for bites from dogs, cats, ferrets).
  - The animal will be submitted to the Public Health Laboratory for rabies testing.
4. **Report all animal bites and rPEP use.**
  - Animal bites: Report to the Town Health Officer with the [Animal Bite Report Form](#).
  - rPEP administration: Complete the [Rabies PEP Report Form](#) and send via fax: 802-951-4061 or secure email: [AHS.VDHEpiLabRabies@vermont.gov](mailto:AHS.VDHEpiLabRabies@vermont.gov).
5. **Follow CDC guidelines for giving rPEP.**
  - For dosage and administration, consult the [CDC ACIP Rabies Vaccine Recommendations](#).

#### **Additional Resources**

- [Rabies webpage \(Vermont Department of Health\)](#)
- [Rabies webpage \(CDC\)](#)
- [CDC Yellow Book: Rabies](#)

If you have any questions, please contact Natalie Kwit at: [Natalie.Kwit@vermont.gov](mailto:Natalie.Kwit@vermont.gov)

To have your information updated please email the  
Vermont HAN Coordinator at: [vthan@vermont.gov](mailto:vthan@vermont.gov).

#### **HAN Message Type Definitions**

**Health Alert:** Conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

**Health Advisory:** Provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

**Health Update:** Provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

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**Health Advisory**  
**August 14, 2025**

**Info Service Message:** Provides general correspondence from the Vermont Department of Health, which is not necessarily considered to be of an emergent nature.

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