

Vaccinating your animals against Rabies: The importance of paperwork

Proof of vaccination of your cats and dogs is necessary to acquire county licenses and is also very important if your pet is exposed to rabies. In horses vaccination against rabies is now considered one of the core vaccines according to the American Association of Equine Practitioners Guidelines for Vaccinations. It is absolutely necessary that owners of vaccinated animals have proof from a licensed veterinarian that the vaccine was handled and administered appropriately. If such proof is not available, the animal that has been exposed to rabies will be assumed to be unvaccinated.

Compendium of Animal Rabies Prevention and Control, 2008*

National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians, Inc. (NASPHV)

PREEXPOSURE VACCINATION AND MANAGEMENT: Parenteral animal rabies vaccines should be administered only by or under the direct supervision of a veterinarian. Rabies vaccinations may also be administered under the supervision of a veterinarian to animals held in animal control shelters prior to release. Any veterinarian signing a rabies certificate must ensure that the person administering vaccine is identified on the certificate and is appropriately trained in vaccine storage, handling, administration, and in the management of adverse events. This practice assures that a qualified and responsible person can be held accountable for properly vaccinating the animal. Within 28 days after initial vaccination, a peak rabies virus antibody titer is reached and the animal can be considered immunized (12). An animal is currently vaccinated and is considered immunized if the initial vaccination was administered at least 28 days previously or booster vaccinations have been administered in accordance with this compendium.

Regardless of the age of the animal at initial vaccination, a booster vaccination should be administered 1 year later (see Parts II and III for vaccines and procedures). No laboratory or epidemiologic data exist to support the annual or biennial administration of 3- or 4-year vaccines following the initial series. Because a rapid anamnestic response is expected, an animal is considered currently vaccinated immediately after a booster vaccination (13).

POSTEXPOSURE MANAGEMENT: This section refers to any animal exposed (see Part I.A.1.) to a confirmed or suspected rabid animal. Wild mammalian carnivores or bats that are not available or suitable for testing should be regarded as rabid animals.

(a) **DOGS, CATS, AND FERRETS.** Unvaccinated dogs, cats, and ferrets exposed to a rabid animal should be euthanized immediately. If the owner is unwilling to have this done, the animal should be placed in strict isolation for 6 months. Isolation in this context refers to confinement in an enclosure that precludes direct contact with people and other animals. Rabies vaccine should be administered upon entry into isolation or 1 month prior to release to comply with preexposure vaccination recommendations (see Part I.B.1.a.). There are currently no USDA licensed biologics for postexposure prophylaxis of previously unvaccinated domestic animals, and there is evidence that the use of vaccine alone will not reliably prevent the disease in these animals (22). Animals overdue for a booster vaccination need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis (e.g., severity of exposure, time elapsed since last vaccination, number of prior vaccinations, current health status, local rabies epidemiology). Dogs, cats, and ferrets that are currently vaccinated should be revaccinated immediately, kept under the owner's control, and observed for 45 days. Any illness in an isolated or confined animal should be reported immediately to the local health department. If signs suggestive of rabies develop, the animal should be euthanized and the head shipped for testing as described in Part I.A.8.

(b) **LIVESTOCK.** All species of livestock are susceptible to rabies; cattle and horses are the most frequently reported infected species (2). Livestock exposed to a rabid animal and currently vaccinated with a vaccine approved by USDA for that species should be revaccinated immediately and observed for 45 days. Unvaccinated livestock should be euthanized immediately. If the animal is not euthanized it should be kept under close observation for 6 months. Any illness in an animal under observation should be reported immediately to the local health department. If signs suggestive of rabies develop, the animal should be euthanized and the head shipped for testing as described in Part I.A.8.

