

Animal Bites

What is considered a “bite”?

A “bite” is considered any break in the skin caused by the tooth of an animal. This includes abrasions, scratches, punctures, cuts, etc.

Can you report non-bite animal incidents?

Yes! In fact, it is important to report these incidents so that the Health Department is aware of potentially vicious animals in the county that pose a threat to public health.

What should you do if you’re bitten by a dog or cat? [Dog Bite – for Victim](#)

1. Exchange information with the owner and ask if their dog is vaccinated against rabies.
2. Wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water.
3. Seek medical attention if needed and be sure your tetanus shot is up to date.
4. Report the bite incident to your local law enforcement agency.
5. If there are concerns about a potential rabies exposure or vicious animal, the Health Department may follow-up with you.
6. Contact the Health Department if you have any additional questions or concerns.

What should you do if you’re bitten by an animal other than a dog or cat?

1. Wash the wound thoroughly and seek medical attention if needed.
2. Call the Coulee Region Humane Society (CRHS) to seize the animal.
 - a. If the animal is unable to be captured, consult with your physician about Postexposure prophylaxis (PEP), particularly if the animal had rabies symptoms.
 - b. If the animal was captured, CRHS will send a specimen to the Wisconsin State Lab of Hygiene (WSLH) for rabies testing.
 - i. If negative, no further action needs to be taken.
 - ii. If indeterminate/positive, consult with your doctor about starting PEP.
3. You may consult the DHS [Rabies Algorithm](#) as a guide for recommended next steps.
4. To learn more about Postexposure prophylaxis (PEP), visit [CDC When to Seek Medical Care for Rabies](#).

Bat Exposures: Due to the nature of bat bites and scratches being small, unnoticed, and/or disregarded, bat exposures increase the risk of human rabies cases. Additionally, about 3-4% of bats submitted to WSLH for rabies testing are found to be positive. Because of this, some non-bite bat exposures can constitute as a potential exposure to rabies and call for submission of the bat specimen to WSLH for rabies testing:

- The bat has direct contact with a human or domestic animal, unless the possibility of a bite, scratch, or mucosal exposure is able to be ruled out explicitly.
- The bat was in the same room as person who was sleeping, or with a previously unattended child, intoxicated person, or person with a mental disability.

If you attempt to capture the biting animal yourself, do not crush its skull! The state lab requires that the brain material remain intact for a conclusive rabies test. To learn more about the WSLH rabies testing procedure, visit slh.wisc.edu/rabies.

What should you do if your dog or cat bites a person? [Dog Bite – for Owner](#)

[Animal Bite Procedure Flowchart](#)

[Animal Bite Follow-Up Timeline](#)

1. After a bite incident:
 - a. The *biting* animal must **quarantine for 10 days**, with the bite date as *Day 0*:
 - i. At home, if currently vaccinated against rabies
OR
 - ii. At a veterinary clinic, if not vaccinated against rabies
 1. If your vet does not offer this service, you may contact the Coulee Region Humane Society to schedule a quarantine appointment.
 2. Your pet must receive the rabies vaccine on or after Day 10. The vaccine should not be administered during quarantine.
 - b. The *biting* animal must be observed at **2 veterinary exams**:
 - i. Exam #1: within 24 hours of the bite
 - ii. Exam #2: on Day 10
 1. If the bite incident occurred while vet clinics were closed, please schedule the first exam as soon as possible after the bite.
 2. If Day 10 lands on a day when vet clinics are closed, please schedule the final exam as soon as possible **after** Day 10.
2. After the 10-day quarantine and 2 exams are complete, you must send a completed Quarantine Release form signed by a veterinarian to the Health Department.
3. If the Health Department is unable to verify that the biting animal is up to date on its rabies vaccination, you must also provide proof of rabies vaccination.

Note that the biting animal must remain in the owner's custody for the duration of quarantine unless quarantining at a veterinary clinic. To ensure that proper quarantine procedures are followed, **DO NOT RE-HOME or EUTHANIZE** the animal during quarantine.

Why is the 10-day quarantine necessary?

Rabies is fatal to humans in 99.9% of cases. As vectors of the rabies virus, dogs and cats can potentially transmit rabies to a human, but the only way to test an animal for rabies is by euthanizing it to test its brain for the virus. To avoid this, the 10-day quarantine ensures that the dog or cat remains available so that it can be observed for signs of rabies.

If the animal remains healthy during the 10 days, this indicates that it did not have the rabies virus in its saliva at the time of the bite, so the victim does not have to receive PEP.

On the other hand, if the animal develops symptoms of rabies during the 10-day quarantine, it may indicate that it had the rabies virus in its saliva at the time of the bite, so the victim would need to receive PEP immediately to prevent human rabies before symptoms appear.

What laws and ordinances do these guidelines come from?

[Wisconsin Statute 95](#): Animal Health

[95.21](#) Rabies control program

[Wisconsin Statute 173](#): Animals; Humane Officers

[Wisconsin Statute 174](#): Dogs

[Wisconsin Chapter ATCP 13](#): Local Rabies Control Programs

[La Crosse County Ordinance Chapter 11.31](#): Animal Regulations

What happens if you do not complete the quarantine procedure?

If the health department does not receive the Quarantine Release form or proof of rabies vaccination by 13 days after the bite incident (3 days after the end of quarantine), the non-compliance procedure will begin:

1. On approximately the 15th day after the bite incident, the health department will issue a citation for failure to comply with the rabies vaccination, the quarantine order, and/or the 3 ordered exams by a licensed veterinarian.
2. The defendant will have until 5 days before their intake court date to submit the requested documentation to the health department to dismiss the citation.
3. If the defendant fails to do this:
 - a. And does not attend intake court, they will be found guilty by default.
 - b. And pleads not guilty at intake court:
 - i. The defendant submits requested documentation to the health department before the pre-trial date to dismiss the citation.
 - ii. The defendant attends trial, and the court makes a judgment.