



## NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

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**To:** Local Health Directors and Animal Control Officers  
**From:** Carl Williams and Emily Herring, Public Health Veterinarians  
**Subject:** Rabies confinement for dogs, cats, and ferrets and rabies updates  
**Date:** 19 DEC 2025

This brief summary is intended to assist local authorities in the management of dogs, cats, and ferrets that bite a person.

### **Requirement for confinement of biting animals**

Any dog, cat, or ferret (regardless of rabies vaccination status) that bites a person must be confined and observed for a 10-day period per NCGS 130A-196. The local health director designates the location and conditions of the 10-day confinement. At-home confinement is NOT guaranteed but may be allowed at the discretion of the local health director. The recommended practice is to avoid euthanasia in favor of the 10-day confinement.

### **If death or symptoms of rabies occur during confinement**

If the dog/cat/ferret dies (for any reason) or develops clinical symptoms suggestive of rabies during the 10-day confinement period, the animal should be humanely euthanized, and the head should be submitted for rabies diagnostic testing per NCGS 130A-199. *If the dog/cat/ferret does not die or develop clinical signs suggestive of rabies during the 10-day confinement period, then it can be concluded that the dog/cat/ferret was not shedding rabies virus in its saliva at the time of the bite.* Rabies PEP would not be warranted for the bite victim.

### **Procedures during confinement**

While not specifically addressed by NCGS, it is the recommendation of the NC DPH that the rabies vaccine or other vaccines are not administered to the dog/cat/ferret during the confinement period. This will avoid confusing signs of rabies with possible side effects of vaccine administration.

### **Additional considerations for euthanasia**

Per NCGS 130A-192 animal control officers may canvass the county to determine if there are any animals not wearing the required rabies vaccination tag. Any animals found must be held for a minimum of 72 hours to permit owner reclamation. If the animal is not reclaimed by the owner, it may be placed for adoption or humanely euthanized. Per NCGS 130A-199 a dog, cat, or ferret diagnosed as having rabies by a licensed veterinarian must be euthanized and submitted for rabies diagnostic testing. This requirement exists even in the absence of a recognized bite.

### **Cases involving multiple jurisdictions**

The statutes do not specifically address which health director has authority in cases where multiple jurisdictions are involved. Local health directors are encouraged to resolve these issues in a manner that is mutually agreed upon. In lieu of that, the NC Division of Public Health recommends that the health director for the jurisdiction where the bite victim resides act as the lead agent and implement the confinement, even if the biting animal is from another county. This will ensure that the bite victim (or their legal guardian) knows who to contact to stay informed about the status of the biting animal, and receive guidance for post exposure bite management, including a rabies risk assessment.

#### **NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES • DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

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#### Rabies specimen acceptance policy

As a reminder, testing resources are reserved for situations where the testing outcome will influence patient management decisions. Terrestrial animal submissions are limited to significant rabies vector species that **expose humans, livestock, or unvaccinated pets**. Exposure is defined as a bite that breaks the skin or contact of mucous membranes or broken skin with either animal saliva or nervous tissue.

Dogs, cats and ferrets that do not exhibit signs of rabies and which bite people, pets or livestock should not be euthanized and instead should be confined and observed for 10 days.

Wild animals (unlike dogs, cats, and ferrets) should not be held for observation following an exposure, but rather should be caught, euthanized immediately, and the head submitted for rabies virus detection. Bats that have interaction with humans should be submitted for testing only if the contact involves:

- A bite.
- Handling where a bite cannot be ruled out.
- Bats found in a domicile with access to humans while they were asleep, unconscious, or incapacitated.