



RABIES IN BC WHAT VETERINARIANS NEED TO KNOW

BY ERIN FRASER, BSc, MSc, DVM

With the recent human rabies case on Vancouver Island, the number of inquiries about rabies and reports of potential exposures have dramatically increased across the province. In BC, rabies is one of the animal diseases that is reportable to the Chief Veterinary Officer under the Reportable and Notifiable Disease Regulation, pursuant to the BC Animal Health Act (2014). BC veterinarians fulfill their reporting requirements by submitting samples from a suspect animal to the CFIA laboratory for rabies testing.

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Any veterinarian who suspects rabies in an animal (dead or alive) should inform the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) Public Health Veterinarian at 778.677.7790 to obtain assistance with risk assessment and management. Detailed guidelines for veterinarians can be found on BCCDC's website at: www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/rabies.

These guidelines were developed by an expert panel of BC veterinarians and public health practitioners using evidence, expert opinion, and consensus.

When a veterinarian becomes aware that a human has been exposed to a potentially rabid animal (domestic or wild) they should:

1. explain that rabies is a zoonotic disease;
2. encourage the person to consult their physician or local public health authority for further guidance; and
3. report the potential human rabies exposure to the health authority where the exposed person lives.

In BC, veterinarians and animal health technicians are considered to be at medium risk for exposure to the rabies virus. Serological testing of veterinary workers is recommended every two years to assess antibody levels. A booster immunization is recommended when the antibody level is less than 0.5 IU/ml.