

Rabies Q & A

Prevention is the Best Medicine

ovma.org/pet-owners



This Q & A is intended to answer some of the common questions you may have about rabies in Ontario. Your veterinarian is your partner in animal health and has the training, knowledge and qualifications to give you the best advice on how to protect your pets. Contact your local veterinarian to create a health care plan customized to your pet's needs.

Q1: What is rabies?

A: Rabies is a viral disease transmitted through the saliva or tissues in the nervous system from one infected mammal to another. Rabies can be transmitted from a wild animal, such as a bat or racoon, to a dog, cat or human, and from pets to humans. The virus attacks the central nervous system causing severely distressing neurological symptoms before causing the victim to die. Rabies is one of the deadliest diseases on Earth, with a 99.9 per cent fatality rate. For detailed information about rabies visit omafra.gov.on.ca and type in the search "rabies in Ontario".

Q2: Does my pet have to be vaccinated against rabies?

A: Yes. Dogs, cats and ferrets over three months of age must have either a current Certificate of Vaccination or a current Statement of Exemption issued by a veterinarian for that animal. Unvaccinated animals are a risk to human health, and owners of unvaccinated animals can be subject to fines of more than \$90 per animal.

Q3: What happens to unvaccinated animals that come into contact with rabid animals?

A: Once signs of rabies appear, the disease is almost always fatal. The incubation period for rabies in dogs and cats can be up to six months. If your animal is unvaccinated and comes into contact with a rabid animal, it may need to be confined for up to six months. If in that time your pet contracts rabies, the only option is euthanasia, as your pet would die from the disease within 7-10 days.

Q4: What happens to unvaccinated animals that bite a person?

A: Any domestic animal that bites a person should be reported to the local public health unit. The animal will be placed under a 10-day (dogs and cats) or 14-day (most other domestic animals) observation period. If the animal does not display any clinical signs of rabies by the end of this period, then the risk that it could have been shedding the rabies virus in its saliva when the bite occurred is negligible. Washing any wound immediately after exposure to animal saliva can greatly reduce the risk of infection. After exposure, the local public health unit should be contacted to determine risk of exposure.

Q5: How many cases of rabies have been reported in Ontario?

A: The Canadian Food Inspection Agency provides a yearly listing of positive rabies cases reported by species in each province. To view a list of reported cases go to inspection.gc.ca and type in the search "rabies in Canada".

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Q6: Where can I get my pet vaccinated?

A: Rabies vaccinations are available from any accredited veterinary practice in Ontario. Before administering the vaccination, your veterinarian will conduct a physical examination of your pet to ensure that he or she is healthy enough to be vaccinated. The examination also allows your veterinarian to identify any concerns about your pet's health and treat them before they become serious and costly illnesses. Learn more about basic pet care at ovma.org/pet-owners.

Q7: How long does the rabies vaccine last?

A: Rabies vaccinations protect your pet for three years. Talk to your veterinarian to learn more about how the vaccine protects your pet.

Q8: Is the rabies vaccine safe?

A: Some animals may experience adverse reactions to the rabies vaccine, ranging from minor to severe. You should discuss your animal's risk, health and any prior reactions your animal has had to vaccines and medications with your veterinarian to determine if your pet can be safely vaccinated. Animals should be monitored for reactions after they are vaccinated and in consultation with your veterinarian.

Q9: I heard the rabies vaccine can last longer than three years. Can't I just titre my pet instead of revaccinating?

A: Titering is a blood test that can measure the level of antibodies present in your pet. Titering is not an alternative to vaccinating for rabies. The legislation in Ontario that requires animals to be vaccinated states that the vaccine is valid until the date listed on the rabies certificate issued by a veterinarian upon vaccination. Once the date has passed, the animal is required by law to be revaccinated.

Q10: How do vaccines work and what other vaccines are recommended for dogs and cats?

A: The vaccinations your pet needs will depend on a variety of factors, including health, age, lifestyle and risk of exposure. Consult your veterinarian on what's best for your animal. Learn more about vaccines at ovma.org/pet-owners.

Q11: How is rabies being controlled in Ontario?

A: In wildlife populations, the Ministry of Natural Resources has engaged in regular rabies vaccine baiting programs for more than 25 years. Rabies vaccine baiting involves the distribution of oral rabies vaccines. Baiting takes place in areas where rabies has been detected within the past two years and in U.S. border areas such as the Niagara Region and in Eastern Ontario.

Q12: What happens if my pet eats a rabies bait vaccine intended for wildlife?

A: The baits cannot be used to vaccinate domestic animals. They are specifically designed to vaccinate wildlife. Pets still need to be vaccinated with a licensed injectable product.

Contact your local veterinarian - they're here to help.