



Pat Quinn, Governor
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MEMORANDUM

TO: Local Health Departments, Regional Offices of Illinois Department of Public Health, Infection Control Professionals, Infectious Disease Physicians, Hospital Emergency Departments

FROM: Connie Austin, D.V.M., M.P.H., Ph.D.
State Public Health Veterinarian

DATE: March 26, 2013

SUBJECT: Dog and Cat Bites in Illinois. When is rabies PEP recommended?

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide information regarding decision making about the need for rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) following dog and cat bites.

The information that should be gathered when someone is seen for a dog or cat bite is:

- Where did the bite take place geographically (within Illinois, out-of-state or out of the country)? At what address did the exposure take place?
- Does the person have a description of the animal (collars, color and markings, breed, owner of the dog or cat) and is it available for testing or a 10 day confinement period as needed?
- Health care providers should probe with the bite victim or parent or guardian of a child to make a determination of whether the bite was provoked or not provoked
 - Provoked examples - petting or handling an unfamiliar dog or cat, separating two fighting animals, running or biking by a dog, taking food away from a dog or cat, kicking or shooing away a dog or cat, moving by the dog's home
 - Unprovoked examples – the person is walking in a park and a dog or cat comes up and bites them for no reason
- Did the animal appear to be healthy or did it appear to have any signs/symptoms of rabies – including trouble walking, paralysis, excess salivation, neurologic signs, extreme aggressiveness

The information obtained from the patient should be used in risk assessment to determine whether a recommendation for rabies PEP should be made. Local animal control should always be contacted so that they can try to find the biting dog or cat for either testing or confinement. **If the dog or cat is healthy and the bite is provoked the dog or cat should be held for 10 days rather than submitted for rabies testing.**

It is also useful for animal control to gather information about whether the cat or dog is up-to-date on its rabies vaccination and if it is allowed to roam. If the dog or cat bite takes place in Illinois, with the current rabies situation in the state, the following should apply:

- Healthy biting dog or cat AND a provoked bite
 - No PEP recommended even if the dog or cat cannot be located
 - If possible, the dog or cat should be confined for 10 days by local animal control. If the animal would die or become ill with signs of rabies during the 10 days, the animal should be tested for rabies. A positive rabies result would mean rabies PEP should be started.

- Biting dog or cat has signs of rabies OR it is an unprovoked bite
 - If the biting animal tests negative – no rabies PEP is recommended
 - If the biting animal is untested or tests positive – rabies PEP is recommended
 - It is recommended that the animal be tested immediately. Confinement for 10 days would not be appropriate in this situation.

Rabies PEP is very expensive, especially for uninsured patients, so administration of PEP should be given when necessary but not if a healthy dog or cat bites someone in a provoked manner. There has not been a case of dog rabies in Illinois since 1994. If rabies PEP is started unnecessarily, rabies PEP can be discontinued. For dog or cat bites that take place in other states or other countries always contact your local or state health department as the rabies situation outside of Illinois may be very different than the situation in Illinois. If rabies PEP has been started in other countries, please be aware that rabies biologics administered in other countries may not offer the level of protection that FDA approved products in the United States offer.