

# What is a RABIES exposure?

Response to **dogs, cats and ferrets** that may have been exposed

## Local Rabies Contact:

Dogs, cats and ferrets with a current rabies certificate that are exposed to rabies should receive a rabies vaccine booster and be confined for 45 days of observation.

Any dog, cat or ferret that is unvaccinated and is exposed to rabies should be euthanized or vaccinated as soon as possible and placed in isolation. The local health department (LHD) determines the length of isolation and approves the isolation unit. The LHD determines the response to animals with expired vaccines.

Rabies is transmitted through bites or when wet saliva or central nervous system (CNS) tissue from a rabid animal enters an open wound or mucous membranes like in the eyes, nose, or mouth. An exposure is any situation where saliva or CNS tissue from a rabid animal, a high-risk animal\*, or a low-risk animal\*\* behaving abnormally could have had direct contact with the mucus membranes or a break in the skin of a domestic animal. Exposing animals will be presumed rabid if not tested.

**Call your local health department or local animal protection office if you think a domestic animal may have been exposed to rabies.**

<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/local-health-districts/>

**\*High-risk animals** for rabies include raccoons, skunks, foxes and bats. In Virginia, large rodents, like groundhogs, are also high-risk. All of these animals are considered high-risk regardless of behavior or health at the time of the exposure.

**\*\*Low-risk animals**, like small rodents and rabbits, are only a concern if they are acting ill or behaving abnormally at the time of the rabies exposure.



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OF HEALTH