
Rabies in Ontario: OMAFRA Update

April 26, 2017

Since 2014, OMAFRA has been working with local veterinarians to respond to and manage potential domestic animal exposures to rabies. Local veterinarians should be the first point of contact for animal owners with concerns about their animals' health, including potential rabies exposures. It is important to ensure that clinic staff are aware of how to direct such calls from animal owners. **As of July 1, 2017, animal owners who call OMAFRA directly concerning potential rabies exposures will be advised to contact a local veterinarian instead.** Veterinarians can then contact OMAFRA for assistance with risk assessments, sample submission or post-exposure management, as needed.

Since December 2015, a total of 303 cases of raccoon rabies have been confirmed in Hamilton and surrounding areas, primarily in raccoons and skunks, as well as 2 stray cats, 1 red fox and 1 llama. In the same timeframe, 8 cases of fox rabies have been confirmed in Perth and Huron counties, including 6 bovines and 2 skunks.

The OMAFRA rabies website includes detailed information about rabies response in Ontario. It has a section for owners and a more detailed section specifically for veterinarians, including a [rabies response training module](#) and [risk assessment flowchart](#). OMAFRA also posts the latest surveillance maps from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR) as they're released:

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/food/inspection/ahw/rabies.htm>

Veterinarians need to remain vigilant for cases of domestic animal exposure to potentially rabid animals. There continues to be a risk of incursion of fox rabies from northern regions of the province and of raccoon rabies from New York State. Contact with rabid bats also remains a risk in all regions. The best protection against rabies for both domestic animals and people is to avoid contact with potentially rabid wildlife and to keep domestic animals up-to-date on rabies vaccination. Rabies vaccination for dogs and cats is a regulatory requirement in most of the province, and should also be considered for livestock, particularly in high-risk areas. If you suspect a domestic animal may have recently been exposed to a potentially rabid animal, it should be vaccinated (or revaccinated) as soon as possible if it isn't possible to have the offending animal tested.

Reminder of whom to call in cases of potential rabies exposure:

- 1. Human exposure to a potentially rabid animal → Local Public Health (PH) Unit**
- 2. Domestic animal exposure to a potentially rabid animal, NO human exposure → Local veterinarian**
 - Animal owners should contact their local veterinarian as the first step for any animal health concerns.
 - Veterinarians can refer to the [online training materials](#) or call the OMAFRA Agricultural Information Contact Centre: 1-877-424-1300 for assistance. **As of July 1st, OMAFRA will no longer respond to calls directly from animal owners.**
- 3. Abnormal wildlife, NO domestic animal exposure, NO human exposure → MNR or CWHC**
 - For assistance with a live animal, contact a local animal/wildlife control agency first.
 - For terrestrial wildlife, once dead or confined, call the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR) Rabies Hotline: 1-888-574-6656.
 - If a sick or injured bat is found, consider contacting the Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative (CWHC) at 1-866-673-4781.

Additional information for the public & veterinarians:

OMAFRA Rabies in Ontario website: <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/food/inspection/ahw/rabies.htm>

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