Not Vaccinated or Past-Due on Rabies Vaccination

When a dog, cat or ferret without current rabies immunization is known or suspected to be exposed to a rabid or suspect rabid animal, it should be immediately euthanized. If the owner is unwilling to have the animal euthanized, it should be placed in strict isolation for six months. Isolation in this context refers to confinement in an enclosure that precludes direct contact with people and other animals. Rabies vaccine should be administered upon entry into isolation OR 28 days prior to release; neither is preferred as long as the animal is considered vaccinated by the end of the isolation period. If given at the start of the isolation period, this vaccination does NOT serve as post-exposure prophylaxis for the animal, but may provide protection in the event of another exposure occurring during isolation.

This situation is of the greatest concern to public health officials because of the much greater possibility that a domestic animal will develop rabies if it is unimmunized. Although one would expect onset of illness within 45 days, there have been documented cases where this has occurred in unimmunized pets 5-6 months after exposure. Accordingly, this period of strict isolation is set at six months.

### Conditions of Confinement/Isolation

The following is a list of conditions that must be met during both the 10-day confinement and observation period (for a domestic animal that exposes a human or other domestic animal) and the 6-month isolation period (for a domestic animal that is not up-to-date on rabies vaccine and that itself was exposed by a suspect rabid animal).

The dog, cat, or ferret:

1. Must be kept on the owner’s premises in an escape-proof building or enclosure (house, garage, etc.) at the responsibility of an adult owner/keeper under the supervision of the local ACO, or in an animal shelter or veterinary clinic (ACO must be notified);
2. May not be allowed to run at large or left outside unsupervised where it may come into contact with other animals, as in a fenced yard or on a chain;
3. Should not be permitted to have contact with other animals or people;
4. If confined and observed at home, cannot be off the owner’s property unless being taken to a veterinary hospital for examination or euthanasia under the control of an adult and on a leash or in a carrier.
5. If the animal shows any changes in health or behavior, it must be examined by a veterinarian, who will determine if rabies testing is indicated.
6. If the animal escapes, notify the local ACO immediately.
7. Should not be sold, given away, euthanized or otherwise disposed of during the confinement or isolation period without prior permission from the ACO.
8. Should be visually inspected by the ACO at the end of the 10-day confinement period, or must be examined by a veterinarian at the end of the 6-month isolation period.

The duration and conditions of these periods, as stated on the official notices (Appendix C), start the day of exposure. See the Rules Governing Rabies Management for more information about the conditions of confinement and isolation. Veterinarians or animal owners with questions on how to properly manage pets exposed to a skunk, bat, or a suspiciously acting carnivore that is unavailable for rabies testing should contact Maine CDC.