

## **Management of Dogs, Cats, and Ferrets Exposed to Rabies**

### Currently Vaccinated

When a currently vaccinated dog, cat or ferret is exposed to a rabid or suspect rabid animal, revaccinate as soon as possible after exposure and observe the animal for 45 days. This observation period is necessary because no vaccine is 100% effective and, therefore, it is possible for a vaccinated animal to contract rabies (14). Because rabies is most likely to become apparent within 1-45 days after exposure, this observation period is set at 45 days.

### 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.