

Quarantine Period for Animal with a Wound of Unknown Origin

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Issue

What are the national quarantine guidelines for a domestic animal with a wound of unknown origin that is not vaccinated against rabies? What quarantine period do Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island require for such an animal?

Summary

A domestic animal (e.g., dog, cat, or ferret) with a wound of unknown origin (e.g., a wound, cut, or scratch that has broken the skin and is presumed to be from another animal) is generally suspected of being exposed to rabies. If the animal has not been vaccinated against rabies, national recommendations are for euthanasia or, alternatively, immediate vaccination and quarantine for four months (dog or cat) or six months (ferret). However, if the age of the wound is unknown or the vaccination is given more than 96 hours after the wound occurred, public health officials may want to quarantine a wounded dog or cat for six months, according to the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians.

Connecticut rabies guidance requires six months of strict confinement for an unvaccinated domestic animal with a wound of unknown origin. For dogs and cats, the state veterinarian may reduce the strict confinement period if the animal is vaccinated against rabies within 96 hours of exposure. In Massachusetts, an unvaccinated animal with a wound of unknown origin must be placed under strict confinement for four months for a dog or cat or six months for any other domestic animal. New York requires a six-month quarantine period. Rhode Island recommends

strict confinement for four months for a dog or cat (but six months if the wound is of unknown age) and six months for a ferret.

National Recommendations for Animals Exposed to Rabies

The National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians issues recommendations for preventing and controlling rabies in the United States. The recommendations facilitate uniformity among jurisdictions, but do not supersede state and local laws or regulations.

The most recent edition of the association's [Compendium of Animal Rabies Prevention and Control](#) was published in 2016 in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association (Vol. 248, pages 505-517). One of the changes introduced by the compendium's 2016 edition related to the quarantine period for unvaccinated domestic animals suspected of rabies exposure. Specifically, the 2016 edition reduced the suggested quarantine period from six months to four months for unvaccinated dogs and cats exposed to rabies.

The compendium recommends that unvaccinated dogs, cats, and ferrets exposed to rabies be euthanized immediately, as there are no approved post-exposure treatments. However, if the animal's owner is unwilling to have the animal euthanized, the recommendation is for the animal to be placed in strict quarantine for four months (dogs and cats) or six months (ferrets). Strict quarantine means confinement in an enclosure that prevents direct contact with people and other animals.

Under the compendium's recommendations, a rabies vaccination should be administered to the animal at the start of the quarantine period and as soon as possible after the suspected rabies exposure. If the vaccination is administered more than 96 hours from exposure, public health officials may consider increasing the quarantine period for dogs and cats from four to six months.

Quarantine Period in Select States

Connecticut

Connecticut law requires the agriculture commissioner or an animal control officer (ACO) to quarantine an animal that is, or is suspected of being, rabid. The commissioner or the state veterinarian must determine the length of the quarantine period, taking into account the animal's age, general health, and vaccination history as well as current accepted veterinary practices ([CGS § 22-359](#)).

According to the state Department of Agriculture, quarantine periods vary based on the type of rabies exposure an animal has had and the animal's vaccination status. Rabies management guidance is found in the state's [Rabies Manual](#). Under the manual's [guidance](#) for domestic animals exposed to wildlife, a dog, cat, or ferret that is not vaccinated against rabies that has a wound of unknown origin must be vaccinated, preferably within 96 hours of exposure, and subject to six months of strict confinement. However, the state veterinarian may reduce the strict confinement period for a dog or cat if the animal is vaccinated within 96 hours of exposure.

Strict confinement means the animal may be kept in an escape-proof enclosure, including the owner's home, as approved by the ACO. The animal may be leash walked under an adult's control on the premises, but cannot come in contact with other humans or animals other than the designated caretaker. During strict confinement, the caretaker must observe the animal daily and its owner must contact the ACO or veterinarian of any unusual behavior or change in health.

Massachusetts

In Massachusetts, a domestic animal that is unvaccinated against rabies that receives a wound of unknown origin is suspected of rabies exposure. Under state regulations, the municipal animal inspector must request the wounded animal's owner for written permission to euthanize the animal. If the owner does not consent to euthanasia, the inspector must order that the animal be vaccinated immediately and placed under strict confinement for four months (dog or cat) or six months (any domestic animal other than a dog or cat). Strict confinement means keeping the animal in an escape-proof, solid-walled building with a roof that the inspector approves. The animal may be leash walked by or under the direct supervision of an adult ([Mass. Regs. Code tit. 330, §§ 10.01 & 10.06](#)).

New York

New York requires an animal that is not actively immunized against rabies and suspected by the local health authority of being exposed to rabies to be destroyed unless it is quarantined for six months either in a veterinary hospital or in a locked, escape-proof enclosure. The health authority must approve of the enclosure, which must minimize contact with humans and other animals ([N.Y. Pub. Health Law § 2140; N.Y. Comp. Codes R. & Regs. tit. 10, § 2.14](#)).

Rhode Island

In Rhode Island, an ACO has the authority to order euthanasia, quarantine, strict confinement, close observation, or rabies immunization, or a combination, for any animal suspected of rabies exposure. Any quarantine must be of duration sufficient to control rabies, as determined by the ACO, who may refer to the recommendations of the Rhode Island Rabies Control Board as

published in the [State of Rhode Island Manual for Rabies Management and Protocols \(R.I. Code R. 40-05-2.11\)](#).

According to the 2016 edition of the manual (page 11), an animal with a wound of unknown origin with no proof of vaccination has a moderate likelihood of rabies exposure. If the animal is a dog or cat and the age of the wound is known, the animal must be vaccinated within 96 hours of being wounded and held in strict confinement for four months. If the age of the wound is unknown, the animal must be vaccinated as soon as possible and held in strict confinement for six months. Ferrets with wounds of unknown origin must be immediately vaccinated against rabies and held in strict confinement for six months.

Under the manual, strict confinement means confining the animal at the owner's home in a way that prevents it from running free and coming into contact with any person or animal that does not also reside there. Strict confinement is permitted in lieu of quarantine in an escape-proof enclosure at the ACO's discretion if the animal is not considered a high risk to escape.

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