

## **RABIES INFORMATION**

Rabies is a deadly viral disease. It can spread to people and pets if they are bitten or scratched by a rabid animal. If a rabies exposure has occurred, rabies vaccines can be given before symptoms begin to try to stop the illness from starting. Once a person or animal starts to show signs of illness, **there is no treatment** and the person will die. The first symptoms of rabies may be very similar to those of the flu including general weakness or discomfort, fever, or headache. These symptoms may last for days. There may be also a discomfort or a prickling or itching sensation at the site of the bite, progressing within days to symptoms of anxiety, confusion, agitation, abnormal behavior, hallucinations and finally death.

In the United States, rabies is mostly found in wild animals like bats, raccoons, skunks, and foxes. Contact with a rabid animal is possible. Pueblo has had ten to twenty-five rabid wild animals a year for the past several years.

Anytime a person is bitten by an animal, rabies risk must be measured. The best way to tell if an animal has rabies is to test its brain. This requires the animal to be euthanized. To reduce the need to euthanize dogs, cats, and ferrets that bite humans, studies have shown if the dog, cat, or ferret is alive and healthy ten days after biting a person, it did not have rabies at the time of the bite. This is the reason why a ten-day post-bite confinement law is in effect. The ten-day post-bite confinement applies to dogs, cats, and ferrets regardless of their rabies vaccination status.

In some situations, ten-day post-bite confinement may not be possible. In this case, euthanasia and testing are required. Situations include: 1) the animal is exhibiting illness consistent with rabies; 2) the animal is injured or terminally ill and would not survive or it would be inhumane to keep it alive for ten days; or 3) the owner requests the animal be immediately euthanized and tested. In all cases, the animal owner is responsible for all costs related to testing, including euthanasia, head removal, shipping and laboratory charges.

In very rare cases, Pueblo Department of Public Health and Environment may allow the owner of a dog, cat, or ferret to waive rabies testing after euthanasia which is not recommended. Below are things to consider:

- Is my pet up-to-date on their rabies vaccine?
- Is my pet kept outside most of the time and therefore more likely to contact wild animals?
- Is my pet inside the house except when they are outside supervised by me?
- Is my pet free to roam or are they confined to a certain part of my yard?
- Is my pet free to roam on walks or is it on a leash?
- Have I seen wild animals such as skunks, raccoons, or bats around my neighborhood?
- Have I smelled skunks in my neighborhood in the last several weeks?

For questions or more information, contact the Health Department (719) 583-4998.

*Prevent • Promote • Protect*

101 West 9th Street • Pueblo, CO 81003 • (719) 583-4300 • [pueblohealth.org](http://pueblohealth.org)

