

Rabies quick guide

The critical role of animal control

Rabies is a fatal but preventable viral disease that affects the nervous system. It can spread to people and pets if they are bitten or scratched by an infected animal. Any mammal can get rabies, including people. In Utah, bats are the primary carrier. To prevent rabies, vaccinate your pets, stay away from wildlife, and get medical care right away after a possible exposure.

A step-by-step approach to rabies

Rabies virus is spread from the saliva of infected animals. Infected saliva enters the body through a bite, scratch, wound, break in the skin, or through the mucous membranes (mouth, nose, eyes).

When a possible rabies exposure is reported to animal control, it's important for the responsible officer(s) to rule out rabies in the exposing animal if they can. Rabies can be ruled out by 1) quarantining dogs and cats for 10 days and watching them for symptoms of rabies, or 2) testing the animal for rabies. A negative rabies test is the only way to rule out rabies in wildlife.

If rabies can't be ruled out or if the animal tests positive, rabies prevention measures are required. Dogs and cats exposed to a suspected or confirmed rabid animal must get a rabies vaccine booster and be quarantined and observed. The type of quarantine is determined by the rabies vaccination status of the dog or cat at the time of exposure. People exposed to a suspected or confirmed rabid animal should start the rabies postexposure prophylaxis (PEP) series as soon as possible.

The role of animal control

- ✓ Respond to animal bites and other rabies exposure events, including the safe removal of wild and/or domestic animals.
- ✓ Prepare specimens for rabies testing and coordinate rabies test submissions.
- ✓ Coordinate and oversee rabies quarantines of domestic animals.
- ✓ Promote and enforce pet rabies vaccination requirements.
- ✗ While it is good to be familiar with rabies PEP guidelines, animal control should not be the primary source of guidance for human exposures to rabies. Refer clients to their local health department and healthcare provider for PEP consultation.

Important contacts

- Find your local health department [here](#).
- Utah DHHS One Health team: onehealth@utah.gov
- Utah DHHS rabies webpage: <https://epi.utah.gov/rabies/>
- Utah DHHS epidemiology: (801) 538-6191
- [Utah Public Health Laboratory virology](#): (801) 965-2584
- Find your Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR) office [here](#).



Rabies testing information

Rabies testing for all animals in Utah is performed at the Utah Public Health Laboratory (UPHL):

Utah Public Health Laboratory
4431 South 2700 West
Taylorsville, UT 84129

Specimen receiving hours:
Monday-Friday 8 am–6 pm
Saturday 8 am–4:30 pm for
hand-delivery only

To submit a specimen:

1. Review and follow [Rabies specimen preparation and transport guidance](#).
2. Review the [Rabies testing and fees guide](#) to determine whether a fee will be applied.
3. Submit a completed [Rabies test request form](#) for *each* specimen. **Provide as much information on this form as possible.**

Go to epi.utah.gov/rabies for more information and other helpful resources.