



BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority

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Reminder to BC veterinarians: Professional responsibilities for communications about rabies, rabies prevention, exposure assessment and management

The Role of Veterinarians in Rabies Prevention, Detection and Control

Veterinarians are essential partners in British Columbia's rabies prevention, detection and control system. They play a critical role in detecting potential rabies cases, assessing and managing animal exposures, facilitating appropriate rabies testing, promoting rabies vaccination, educating clients about rabies prevention, and reporting situations that may pose risks to human or animal health. Veterinarians also serve as a vital link between animal health and public health, helping to prevent rabies transmission and protect the health of people, pets, livestock, wildlife, and communities across the province.

Professional Responsibilities and Public Communications

Under Part 4: Ethics and Standards of the College of Veterinarians of British Columbia, registrants are expected to communicate professionally and provide accurate, evidence-based information to clients, colleagues, and the public. As trusted health professionals, veterinarians should exercise sound professional judgment and ensure that communications about rabies are balanced, scientifically grounded, and aligned with current provincial guidance and public health recommendations.

Public health authorities in British Columbia are responsible for issuing public health messaging concerning human health risks posed by rabies, including public health notices, advisories, information bulletins and responses to media requests. In British Columbia, [rabies surveillance](#) data are compiled and reported by the British Columbia Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) in collaboration with provincial and federal partners. Current surveillance data do not indicate any changes to the epidemiology of rabies in BC. Bats remain the only known reservoir of rabies in the province, and rabies incidence remains low. The annual proportion of bat submissions with human and/or domestic animal contact that test positive for rabies ranges from 1.2% to 13.6% (median: 7.1%). Occasional spillover of bat-variant rabies into terrestrial species, such as skunks, is rare but not unexpected. Spillover events do not indicate sustained rabies transmission in these species, or a change in rabies epidemiology in BC. Fortunately, human rabies infections remain rare with 28 reported cases in Canada since 1924.

Risk Communication and Social Media

In BC, it is expected that rabies is detected in a small number of bats every year. Detecting rabies cases among bats is not unusual, and on its own, does not indicate an increase in rabies risk. Given that public concern about rabies is high, and news stories, social media posts and public commentary can add to

people's concerns about it, veterinarians have a professional responsibility to communicate risk accurately and within the appropriate context.

While individual positive cases in animals may be of professional and public interest, sharing isolated rabies case reports or anecdotal information in interviews, online, or on social media can inadvertently amplify public concern and create a misleading perception that rabies risk is increasing. These type of communications may contribute to unnecessary anxiety, increase demand for medical assessments following low-risk exposures, and put additional pressures on healthcare, public health and veterinary resources. Please leave public communication regarding rabies surveillance findings to public and animal health authorities, who are responsible for interpreting and communicating risk at the population level.

Social Media Reminder:

Before posting about rabies on social media, please remember:

1. **Provide context, not just case details.** The detection of rabies-positive bats is not unusual in BC and should be communicated within the broader context of provincial surveillance data and risk assessment.
2. **Avoid public health risk messaging.** Public health messaging regarding rabies is the responsibility of BCCDC and public health authorities. Share or link to official resources rather than providing independent public health interpretations.
3. **Consider the impact of your post.** Uncontextualized reports of individual rabies cases may inadvertently heighten concern among the public, contribute to unnecessary health care-seeking behaviour, and increase demands on both public and animal health resources. Communications should be balanced, evidence-based, and proportionate to the actual risk.

Client Education and Rabies Prevention

Veterinarians also play a key role in educating clients about rabies prevention. This includes discussing the low but ongoing risk of rabies exposure in BC, counselling owners about avoiding contact with bats and other wildlife and promoting rabies vaccination as an important preventive measure for companion animals. Rabies vaccination helps protect pets, supports appropriate management of potential exposures, and reduces the risk of transmission to people and other animals.

Owners should be reminded that even pets that are primarily or exclusively kept indoors may still be exposed to rabies if they escape outdoors or encounter bats that enter the home. Maintaining current rabies vaccination for dogs, cats, and other eligible companion animals remains a crucial component of rabies prevention in British Columbia.

Use of the BC Rabies Guidance for Veterinarians

Registrants are expected to be familiar with and follow the [BC Rabies Guidance for Veterinarians](#) when assessing and managing suspected rabies exposures and determining when rabies testing is warranted. The guidance provides evidence-based recommendations on exposure risk assessment, management of exposed animals, reporting obligations, client communication, and specimen submission procedures.

Practice owners and managers should also ensure that veterinarians and support staff involved in rabies-related consultations are aware of and follow the guidance so that rabies exposures are managed consistently and in accordance with provincial recommendations.

Key Message

By providing balanced, evidence-based information, promoting rabies prevention and vaccination, using the BC Rabies Guidance for Veterinarians to assess and manage exposures, and relying on official animal and public health resources for rabies surveillance and risk messaging, veterinarians help ensure the public receives accurate information. Following these best practices maintains confidence in BC's public and animal health systems.

Resources

[https://www.bccdc.ca/Documents/BC Rabies Guidance for Veterinarians.pdf](https://www.bccdc.ca/Documents/BC_Rabies_Guidance_for_Veterinarians.pdf)

<https://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/rabies>

[Information for Veterinarians](#)