



Health Department

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What You Need To Know If Your Cat Or Dog Bites Someone

Wisconsin Quarantine Requirements for Dogs and Cats that have Bitten a Person

Wisconsin state law (SS 95.21) requires that any dog or cat which bites a person be quarantined for ten days so that it can be observed for signs of rabies. This brochure explains what such a quarantine involves and gives the reasons why these measures must be taken. Note that the information in this brochure applies only to dogs and cats that have bitten a person, and that the requirements of the quarantine vary depending on whether the animal is current on its rabies immunizations.

UNVACCINATED Dogs and Cats

- If an unvaccinated dog or cat bites a person, an officer will order that animal quarantined for a period of at least 10 days after the bite. The "officer" can be a public health official, a law enforcement officer, a DNR warden, or a humane officer.
- Within 24 hours after the quarantine order is issued, the unvaccinated dog or cat must be delivered to an isolation facility (e.g. veterinary clinic, humane society shelter, pound) for a 10 day observation period.
- During the 10 day quarantine the dog or cat will be held under strict isolation at the isolation facility and examined by a licensed veterinarian on the first day, the last day, and one intervening day of the observation period.
- The quarantine may be released after the veterinarian certifies that the animal has exhibited no signs of rabies during the 10 day quarantine period.
- The veterinarian may extend the quarantine if clinical signs warrant the extension. This rarely occurs.
- After the quarantine is released, the animal can be vaccinated against rabies. Rabies vaccinations are not to be administered during the observation period.
- In the event that an animal under quarantine does exhibit signs of rabies, state statute requires that the animal be humanely killed and the brain submitted for rabies testing.
- The owner of the animal is responsible for all expenses incurred in connection with the quarantine.

VACCINATED Dogs and Cats

- If a vaccinated dog or cat (as shown by a valid rabies certificate) bites a person, an officer will order that animal quarantined for a period of at least 10 days after the bite. The "officer" can be a public health official, a law enforcement officer, a DNR warden, or a humane officer.
- Vaccinated dogs and cats may be quarantined on the premises of the owner if the animal is kept in an escape proof enclosure or in the home and walked on a leash by a responsible adult. If a quarantine cannot be adequately maintained on the premises of the owner, an officer may order a vaccinated dog or cat to be quarantined at an isolation facility.

- During the 10 day quarantine the dog or cat must be examined by a veterinarian on the first day, the last day, and one intervening day of the observation period. This is the only time the animal may leave the owner's premises.
- If the animal displays signs of illness or a change in behavior, it is crucial that the owner notify the veterinarian immediately.
- The quarantine may be released if the veterinarian certifies that the animal has exhibited no signs of rabies during the 10 day quarantine period.
- The veterinarian may extend the quarantine if clinical signs warrant. This rarely occurs.
- Rabies vaccinations are not to be administered during the observation period.
- In the unlikely event that an animal under quarantine does exhibit signs of rabies, state statute requires that the animal be humanely killed and the brain submitted for rabies testing.
- The owner of the animal is responsible for all expenses incurred in connection with the quarantine.

Why is the 10-Day Quarantine Period Necessary?

- Rabies is a fatal viral infection of the central nervous system of warm-blooded animals, including humans. It is usually transmitted through the bite of an animal that has the virus in its saliva, or more rarely by contamination of an open cut or mucous membrane (eyes, nostrils or mouth) with saliva of a rabid animal.
- When a healthy-appearing dog or cat bites a person, there is a remote possibility that the dog or cat could be in the infectious phase of the disease without showing signs of rabies. (That is, the animal could have the rabies virus in its saliva.) In these rare cases, the animal will develop recognizable signs of rabies in a few days allowing time to treat the bite victim preventively for rabies exposure.
- The 10 day quarantine period ensures that the dog or cat remains available so that it can be observed for signs of rabies. If the animal remains well during the 10 days, this indicates it did not have the rabies virus in its saliva at the time of the bite, and therefore the bite victim does not have to receive an expensive and unpleasant series of shots to prevent rabies. This is why it is so important that the dog or cat under quarantine be strictly confined at all times to ensure that it cannot run away or be injured.
- The 10 day confinement and observation period for dogs and cats that bite humans has stood the test of time as a way to prevent human rabies. This quarantine period avoids the need to destroy the biting dog or cat in order to test its brain for the rabies virus.

Penalty for Failing to Comply With Quarantine Requirements

State statute provides for a fine of \$100 - \$1,000 or 60 days imprisonment or both for failure to comply with a quarantine order.

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