

# **SUMMARY OF NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON IMMUNIZATION (NACI) STATEMENT OF April 2026**

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## **Updated guidance on the assessment of exposure to a potentially rabid animal**



TO PROMOTE AND PROTECT THE HEALTH OF CANADIANS THROUGH LEADERSHIP, PARTNERSHIP, INNOVATION AND ACTION IN PUBLIC HEALTH.

—Public Health Agency of Canada

Également disponible en français sous le titre :

DIRECTIVES MISES À JOUR CONCERNANT L'ÉVALUATION DE L'EXPOSITION À UN ANIMAL POTENTIELLEMENT ENRAGÉ

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To obtain additional information, please contact:

Public Health Agency of Canada  
130 Colonnade Rd  
A.L 6501H  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0K9  
Toll free: 1-844-280-5020  
Fax: 613-941-5366  
TTY: 1-800-465-7735  
E-mail: [publications-publications@hc-sc.gc.ca](mailto:publications-publications@hc-sc.gc.ca)

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## OVERVIEW

In April 2026, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) released the National Advisory Committee on Immunization's (NACI) updated guidance on the assessment of exposure to a potentially rabid animal [will insert hyperlink] (i.e., whether and when to offer post-exposure prophylaxis [PEP]). This guidance was developed in collaboration with its Rabies Working Group and Rabies Risk Assessment Subgroup. This guidance does not address PEP regimens nor [pre-exposure prophylaxis \(PrEP\)](#). NACI has updated its framework for the risk assessment of exposure to potentially rabid animals and has also updated the resources to assist in determining local rabies epidemiology. Jurisdictions can use this framework to create standardized recommendations for conducting risk assessments that account for their local/regional context.

The following provides an overview of the guidance with respect to specific animal species:

- **Dogs, cats and ferrets:** NACI continues to recommend a 10-day observation period for dogs, cats and ferrets that are available for observation, providing that the animal is behaving as it usually does. If these animals are not available for observation, a risk assessment should be conducted to determine the need for PEP.
- **Livestock:** NACI now recommends a 14-day observation period for livestock (i.e., cattle, horses, sheep, goats and pigs), providing that the animal is behaving as it usually does.
- **Bats:** NACI continues to recommend that any exposure to a bat (i.e., direct contact or exposure to saliva or neural tissue/fluids into an open wound or mucous membrane) generally requires initiation of PEP as soon as possible. In some circumstances not involving exposure to the head, neck or hands, the health care provider may decide to delay PEP by not more than 48 hours from the time of exposure while awaiting rabies test results on the bat. NACI has not made any changes with regard to the management of bats found in a room.
- **Rodents and lagomorphs:** NACI recommends a risk assessment to determine whether to offer PEP, recognizing that the risk from exposure to most of these animals is very low as they are likely to be killed by larger animals that could have transmitted rabies to them.
- **Other wildlife and exotic animals:** NACI recommends a risk assessment after exposure to other wildlife and exotic animals to determine the need for PEP. Exposures to highly innervated areas such as the head, neck or hands and more severe bite exposures would generally be indications for initiating PEP as soon as possible. If the animal is available, consultation with public health officials and a veterinarian (if available) is recommended to determine the need for euthanasia and testing of the animal. A risk assessment can determine if PEP should begin immediately or if it can wait until rabies test results are available.

The NACI statement also provides advice on:

- Exposures to dead mammals;
- Indirect exposures, such as to fur, surfaces or objects that may be contaminated with rabies virus; and
- Exposures that occur outside of Canada

For details, please see the full statement: Updated guidance on the assessment of exposure to a potentially rabid animal [will insert hyperlink]

## What you need to know

- Rabies is a rare but almost universally fatal infection that most commonly results from the bite of an infected animal.
- In Canada, bats, skunks, foxes, and raccoons are the main reservoirs of rabies virus but any mammal can carry rabies.
- A risk assessment should be conducted every time a human has been exposed to a potentially rabid animal in order to determine the appropriate management, including determining whether and when rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is indicated.
- The risk assessment should consider factors related to the animal, local rabies epidemiology, the exposure and the exposed person.
- The assessment of exposure to potentially rabid animals requires a One Health approach, with strong collaboration among those managing the exposed person (e.g., public health officials and clinicians) and those managing the animal (e.g., veterinarians and animal control officials).

NACI will continue to monitor the evolving evidence and will update guidance as needed.

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