

March 2022

Wildlife Rehabilitators of North Carolina  
Wildlife Symposium

# RVS and VETS

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Minimize Risks, Optimize Outcomes

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# Rabies

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## The Facts



# What is Rabies?

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Most important Lyssavirus globally, with multiple variants in the United States

- ALL MAMMALS are believed to be susceptible.
- Variants of the virus are maintained in the raccoon, skunk, fox and bat populations in the United States
- United States is free (at this time) of the Canine Variant.
- Transmitted animal to animal through bites, with a HIGHLY VARIABLE incubation period. Generally it is 3 to 12 weeks, but can range from several days to months, rarely exceeding 6 months.





# What is Rabies?

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Most important Lyssavirus globally, with multiple variants in the United States

- It is COMMUNCABLE during the period of salivary shedding.
- Shedding starts a few days PRIOR to the onset of clinical signs and DURING illness.





# What is Rabies?

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Clinical signs are VARIABLE and include:

- Inappetance
- Dysphagia
- Cranial nerve deficits
- Abnormal Behavior
- Ataxia
- Paralysis
- Altered vocalization
- Seizures





# Principles of Rabies Prevention and Control

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Case Definition: Requires laboratory confirmation on the basis of either a + result for

- direct fluorescent antibody test (preferred to be performed on CNS tissue) or
- isolation of virus in cell culture or lab animal.

## • RABIES VIRUS EXPOSURE

- Transmitted when introduced to bite wounds, open cuts in skin, or onto mucous membranes from saliva or other infected material such as neural material.





# Principles of Rabies Prevention and Control

- Interdisciplinary Approach
  - Clear and Consistent communication and coordination among relevant animal and human health partners across and within all jurisdiction (International, National, State, and Local) is necessary to most effectively prevent and control rabies.
    - Animal Control
    - Law Enforcement
    - Wildlife Officers
    - Veterinarians
    - Diagnosticians
    - Public Health Professionals
    - Physicians
    - Animal & Pet Owners



# Principles of Rabies Prevention and Control

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- **Awareness and Education**

- Ongoing Public Education
- Responsible Pet Ownership
- Routine Veterinary Care and Education
- Professional Continuing Education







# What is the New Law?

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Rabies Vector Species Rehabilitation



# Qualifications to Apply

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Who gets to rehabilitate RVS?

- Held an ACTIVE rehabilitation license within or outside of NC for AT LEAST the previous 3 years
- Must have been actively rehabbing patients during this time
- Certify 12 hours of Rabies or Rabies Species- specific training, or a combination of.



# Rabies Immunization

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Current up-to-date rabies immunization in accordance with CDC

- For any STAFF MEMBER or VOLUNTER who may come IN CONTACT with a Rabies species.
- PROOF OF VACCINATION
  - Provided upon request
  - Kept at license holder facility



# Veterinary Consent

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Veterinarian who agrees to provide necessary medical treatment to the rabies species.

- License Holder **MUST** consult with veterinarian who agrees to provide medical treatment.
- Contact information **POSTED** at facility



# Notify Animal Control Notify Health Department

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Certify notification to the appropriate departments **PRIOR** to making the application to NCWRC.

- Inform Animal Control and Health Department of anticipated activities
- Inform authorities of LOCATION
- Contact information for agencies POSTED at facility



# Separate Facilities

Separate rabies vector species from non-rabies species.

- Prevent escape of the animal and exposure to
  - People
  - Pets
  - Livestock
  - Other captive wildlife
  - Other free-ranging wildlife
- Exterior caging
  - It must be locked
  - Either surrounded by double fencing or,
  - Solid wall barrier



# Coordinate with Health Department

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Regarding euthanasia and testing of Rabies Vector Species

- Coordinate about EUTHANASIA PROTOCOL
- Coordinate about TESTING PROTOCOL
- Written protocols for testing are posted and made available to NCWRC upon request.



# ALL RVS are considered POTENTIALLY INFECTED with Rabies Virus.

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IF YOU ARE:

Scratched, Bitten, Exposed to saliva, Exposed to CSF fluid, Exposed to brain or spinal cord

Contact the Local Health  
Department IMMEDIATELY

- Euthanasia of the animal and testing may be REQUIRED
- License holders MUST abide by all requests made by PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICIALS and NCRWRC personnel

NO DISPOSAL!

- SCRATCHES
- BITES
- DEATH IN CAPTIVITY
- Local Health Department investigates to determine if TESTING is NECESSARY



# Considerations for the Veterinary Profession

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# Expectations

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- We are expected to:
  - Provide medical support to the rehabilitator in which we consent to work with.
- Withdrawing of veterinary oversight is permitted at any time and for any reason





# Grey Areas

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- Will they call us prior to an exposure issue?
- What does the Rehabber define as "necessary medical care"?
- Will they continue to practice BIO-SAFETY without our presence?
- Will the handling of the species be kept to Rabies Vaccinated Personnel ONLY?
- Will they be extra careful to prevent escape of the Rabies Vector Species?
  - Should the rehabber be local to the counties you service? This is not required by the statute.



# The Risks

What can helping hurt?  
Who can helping hurt?

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- Rabies Vaccination Costs
  - Pender County Health Department
  - \$272.38 each
  - Series of 3 vaccinations
- Rabies Titers
  - Pender County Health Department
  - \$90.00
- Post Exposure Treatment
  - Thousands of \$ for treatment
  - Potential need to involve multiple counties

## Rabies Exposure

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- Exposure to Self and Staff
- Exposure to Clients



# Rabies Exposure

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## Other Considerations

*Potential for Media Coverage*

*Financial Liability-Potential Expense for treatment(s) if exposed*

*Legal Liability- Litigation due to death*

*Potential Exposure to Volunteers and Lay Staff*



# Tips for Providing Responsible Care

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## Providing a Good Outcome



# Good Outcomes

Be Picky. This is SERIOUS. It is FATAL

Get to know Animal Control. They are your first line of communication.

Always wear GLOVES, Always!

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Sponsor someone who you can work with and COMMUNICATE with well.

Clearly define the requirements for YOUR consent. These can be very specific.

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# Good Outcomes

## (continued)

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- Clearly define the cost associated with providing care.
- Require on site exams only? Prevents exposure at your clinic and with potentially other clients.
- Establish clear protocols for your hospital staff on what is expected and required.
- Require a site visit to the Rehabilitator?
  - Initially prior to consenting?
  - Intermittently during the year or at peak times- baby season ?





# Questions?

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## Comments

Provide your email address and I will follow up with anyone who has questions I can't answer

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