



PEI Domestic Animal Rabies Exposure Guideline

Department of Agriculture
Office of the Provincial Veterinarian
2025

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Provincial Domestic Animal Rabies Exposure Guideline has been developed through consultation with all relevant provincial government agencies, including the Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action, and the Department of Health and Wellness. It is meant to be one part of a larger coordinated Provincial response to fit with the human exposure response¹ and the wildlife response.² In addition, similar documents from other jurisdictions were consulted, including the Council of Chief Veterinary Officers (CCVO) Rabies Response Recommendations³. The objective of this document is to provide guidance in the event of possible animal rabies exposure to domestic animals.

2.0 BACKGROUND

All mammals are thought to be susceptible to rabies, which is a fatal viral zoonosis caused by a Lyssavirus.⁴ Animals can become exposed to rabies through contact with saliva or central nervous system material from an infected animal, by a bite through skin, mucous membrane, or non-intact skin. Specific rabies information pertaining to the epidemiology of the disease, such as reservoir, transmission, risk factors, incubation period, and occurrence of disease, is described in the Chief Public Health Office response document.¹ There are various clinical signs associated with rabies in animals, including abnormal behavior, altered vocalization, dysphagia, inappetence, ataxia, paralysis, and seizures. The progression to death is rapid.⁴

Rabies occurrence is a rare event in PEI, with only three documented positive animals in the past 20 years (Figure 1). Annually, between five to 19 samples have been submitted to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) for rabies testing since 2014. Prince Edward Island does not have an active animal rabies surveillance program in place; the Division of Forests, Fish and Wildlife conducts passive surveillance (in partnership with the Canadian Wildlife Cooperative (CWHC)) on raccoons, skunks, foxes, and coyotes captured and euthanized following reports of abnormal behavior. In addition, bats found in homes with domestic cats or dogs are often sent when potential interactions with the pets or humans are unknown.

Human exposure incidents are reported to the Chief Public Health Office, and all case information is collated and saved on a shared drive. Analysis of the data occurs annually to summarize the number of incidents, types of animals involved, nature of the event, if prophylaxis was recommended and accepted, and rabies testing results (if applicable).

¹ Department of Health and Wellness (2015). Prince Edward Island Guidelines for the Management of Possible Rabies Exposure. Chief Public Health Office

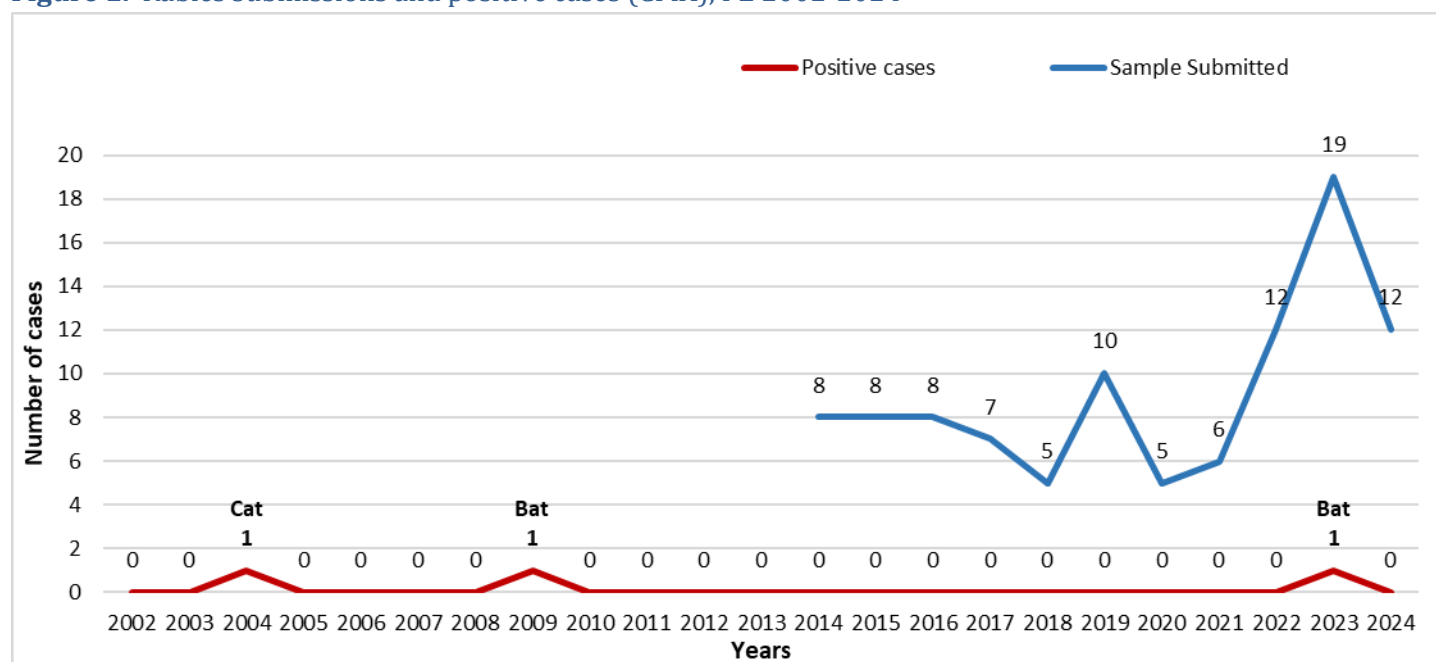
² Department of Communities, Land and Environment (2017). PEI Response Strategy for Raccoon Variant Rabies in Wildlife. Forests, Fish, and Wildlife Division

³ Radke, B., Koeman, J., Keshwani, H., Kostiuik, D. et al. (2015). Recommendations of the Canadian Council of Chief Veterinary Officers Subcommittee for the Management of Potential Domestic Animal Exposures to Rabies.

⁴ Brown, C., Slavinski, S., Ettestad, P., Sidwa, T., Sorhage, F. (2016). Compendium of Animal Rabies Prevention and Control, 2016. JAVMA, 248(5):505-517.

Fortunately, rabies has not become endemic in many of our PEI wildlife populations at this time; however, bats continue to be the primary reservoir of the disease, with at least 0.5% testing positive for rabies when their healthy populations are sampled randomly⁵. For this reason, disease exposure plans must remain in place for instances of human, domestic animal, and wildlife exposure, as well as for potential disease outbreaks.

Figure 1. Rabies submissions and positive cases (CFIA), PE 2002-2024



3.0 DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYM LIST

3.1 Definitions

Companion animal- dogs, cats, and ferrets

Livestock- horse, cattle, sheep, goats (as per Animal Health Act⁶)

Owner observation- a veterinarian-controlled tool developed for potential rabies exposure situations involving animals that have documented vaccination status

⁵ Community bats program of British Columbia (2025). Bats and human health. <https://bcbats.ca/bat-basics/bats-and-human-health/>

⁶ Province of Prince Edward Island (2023). Animal Health Act.

https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/sites/default/files/legislation/a-11-1-animal_health_act.pdf

Post-exposure vaccination- a licensed and approved rabies vaccination that is administered shortly following a possible rabies exposure

Quarantine- restrictions placed on entering or leaving a premises where a case of communicable disease exists⁷

Unvaccinated- not having received a vaccination to produce immunity against a disease

Vaccinate- to inoculate with a vaccine to produce immunity⁸

Wildlife- wild mammals (as per the Wildlife Conservation Act⁹)

3.2 Acronym List

AVC – Atlantic Veterinary College

CA – companion animal

CFIA – Canadian Food Inspection Agency

CCVO – Council of Chief Veterinary Officers

CPHO – Chief Public Health Office

CWHC – Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative

DA – Department of Agriculture

MOA – Memorandum of Agreement

PEIVMA - Prince Edward Island Veterinary Medical Association

PEV – post-exposure vaccination

⁷ Province of Prince Edward Island (2023). Animal Health Act.

https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/sites/default/files/legislation/a-11-1-animal_health_act.pdf

⁸ Blood, D., Studdert, V. (1994) Baillière's Comprehensive Veterinary Dictionary. BaillièreTindall, London.

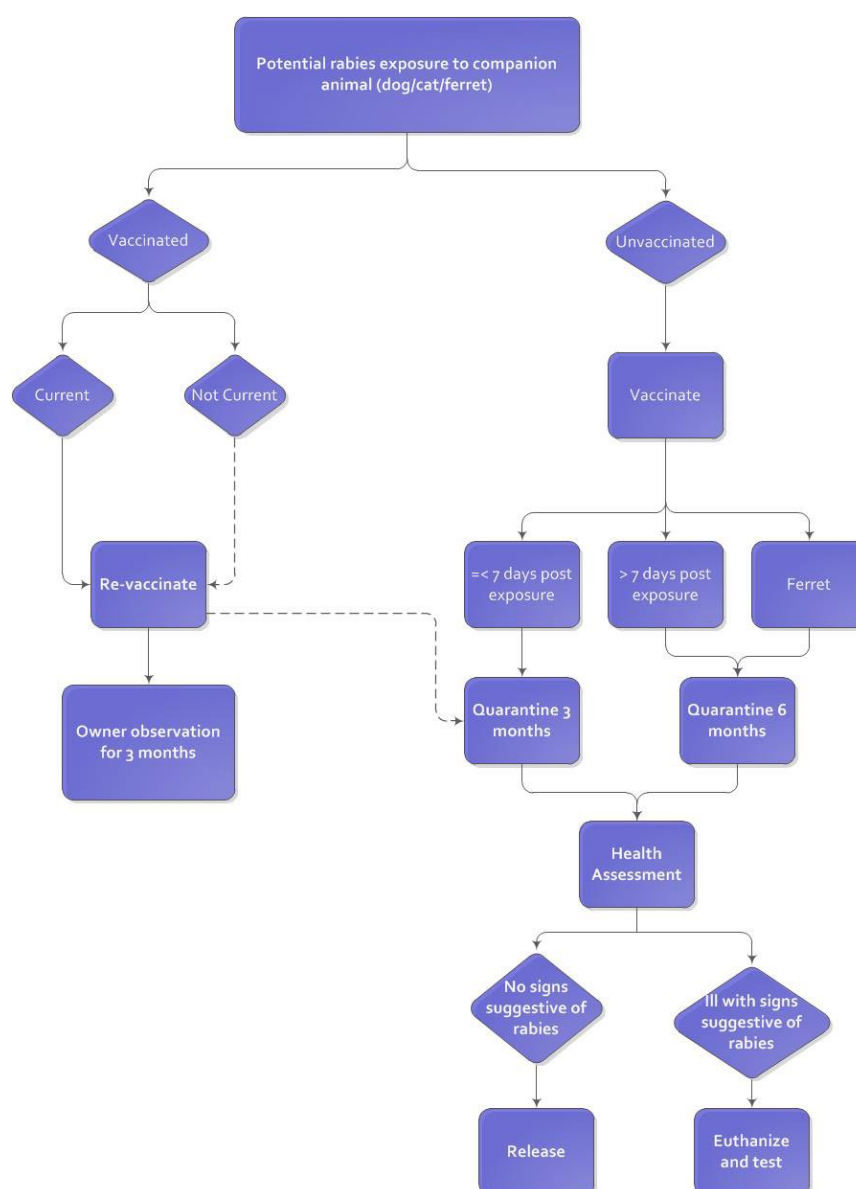
⁹ Province of Prince Edward Island (2017). Wildlife Conservation Act.

https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/sites/default/files/legislation/w04-1g-wildlife_conservation_act_general_regulations.pdf

4.0 RESPONSE PLAN DECISION TREE

Wildlife would be the most common way a domestic animal is exposed to rabies. Domestic animal exposure response varies depending on the animal(s) species. The response for companion animals (CA) differs from that of livestock. The following sections describe the outcomes of the decisions made based on animal type. The response protocol decision trees are below (Figure 2 and Figure 4).

Figure 2. Companion Animal Rabies Exposure Decision Tree



Companion Animals

All CA should be administered an approved rabies vaccine at different time points depending on their age (Figure 3) as recommended by the vaccine manufacturer and the animal's veterinarian. If a CA is exposed to a known rabid or potentially rabid animal, case information will be collected (Appendix 1). The animal's vaccine record will be used to guide decision-making. Rabies vaccination status needs to be determined in consultation with the animal's veterinarian to determine if they are previously vaccinated (current or not current) or unvaccinated.

Figure 3. Rabies vaccination schedule for Companion Animals

Initial Vaccination	Initial Vaccination	Revaccination
CA <16 weeks	CA >16 weeks	-
~12 weeks and booster at one year	At the time of acquisition and booster at one year	Dog/cats Every 3 years Ferrets Annually

All CA, despite their rabies vaccination status, should be vaccinated or re-vaccinated with a licensed and approved rabies vaccine within seven days of their exposure, as there is a body of evidence that suggests that a PEV can reduce the risk of the development of rabies, particularly for those animals that have been previously vaccinated¹⁰.

Companion Animal - Rabies Vaccine is Current

Exposure of a fully vaccinated CA to a potentially rabid animal requires investigation and follow-up. The development of rabies in these situations is rare. Revaccinate the CA as soon as possible after the exposure. The CA will then be placed under "Owner Observation" for three months post-exposure, as they could pose a risk to other animals and humans. The Rabies investigation Owner Observation details are provided in Appendix 2.

Companion Animal - Rabies Vaccine is Not Current

The protection offered by a vaccine depletes with time. Rabies vaccination should be administered every three years¹¹. A rabies vaccine is not considered current if it has been more than 3 years since the most recent administration. A vaccination record will provide a history of the vaccinations administered to the CA and help determine whether a vaccine is considered current or not. CAs that are not current for their rabies vaccine must be revaccinated after the exposure. These situations will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis

¹⁰ Radke, B., Koeman, J., Keshwani, H., Kostiuk, D. et al. (2015). Recommendations of the Canadian Council of Chief Veterinary Officers Subcommittee for the Management of Potential Domestic Animal Exposures to Rabies.

¹¹ American Animal Hospital Association (2022).

<https://www.aaha.org/resources/2022-aaha-canine-vaccination-guidelines/rabies/>

to determine the appropriate follow-up, ie. “Owner Observation” or “Companion Animal - Quarantine¹²” for three months. The overall health status of the animal, number of previous doses of rabies vaccine, time elapsed since last vaccine, and minimal delay in exposure and PEV would all be expected to impact the animal’s immune status¹⁰. The goal of a rabies quarantine is to protect the public, including the animal owner, at all times; to protect any other susceptible animals from exposure to the quarantined animal and to provide observation of the quarantined animal. Details of the “Companion Animal - Quarantine” are found in Appendix 3.

Companion Animal - Unvaccinated for Rabies

Companion animals that have not had a documented rabies vaccine must be vaccinated as soon as possible after exposure. The time to vaccination post-exposure will determine the length of time the CA must be under quarantine. Those CA vaccinated within a week of exposure should be quarantined for a period of three months, and those CA vaccinated after one week of exposure should be quarantined for a period of six months. This difference is based on the evidence surrounding early development of clinical disease, if it were to occur, after PEV, due to a more vigorous immune response to rabies infection.¹³

Ferrets

Unvaccinated ferrets must be vaccinated after exposure and should be quarantined for a period of six months. The longer quarantine period is due to a lack of evidence in the ferret species regarding PEV and its impact on the development of disease.

¹² Province of Prince Edward Island (2023). Animal Health Act.

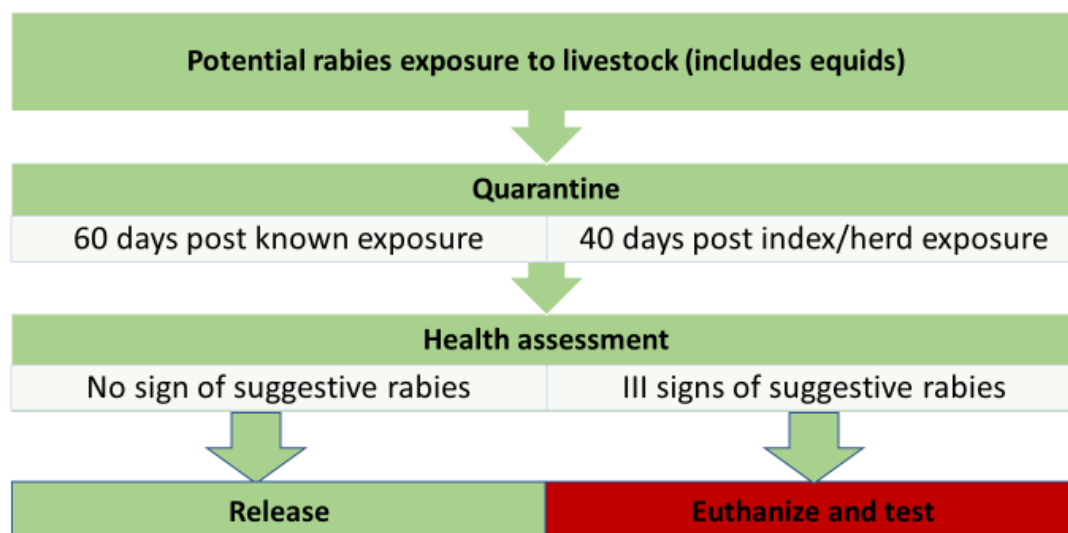
https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/sites/default/files/legislation/a-11-1-animal_health_act.pdf

¹³ Prabhakar, B., Nathanson, N. (1981). Acute Rabies Death Mediated by Antibody. *Nature*; 290(5807):590-1.

Livestock

Livestock may be exposed individually or as a herd, and this will be determined based on the investigation. Case information will be collected. The animal and/or herd should be quarantined for 60 days post-known exposure to the rabid animal or 40 days post-index case/herd. Details of the “Livestock - Quarantine” are found in Appendix 4.

Figure 4. Livestock Rabies Exposure Decision Tree



5.0 Euthanasia, sample preparation, and disposal

5.1 Euthanasia

Companion animals requiring euthanasia will be euthanized by their current veterinarian. If they do not have a veterinarian, arrangements can be made by the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer (Appendix 5). If required, the remains can be picked up by the DA staff and taken to the AVC for sample preparation.

Livestock will be euthanized by their current veterinarian. If they do not have a veterinarian, arrangements can be made by the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer (Appendix 5). The animal will be transported back to AVC Diagnostic Services for sample preparation and disposal.

5.2 Sample preparation

Samples will be prepared and submitted to the designated rabies testing laboratory (CFIA) by the AVC.

5.2.1 Testing Results

If the rabies testing results are positive, then appropriate action as per protocol will be taken. This may include public health follow-up in the instance of human exposures and additional animal quarantine as needed.

5.3 Disposal

Companion animal bodies and livestock carcasses will be incinerated at the AVC.

6.0 Release from Quarantine

After the appropriate owner observation/quarantine period has elapsed, the domestic animal will be examined by a licensed veterinarian for a health assessment. If the animal is deemed healthy, the owner observation/quarantine will be released by the Provincial Veterinarian with no further follow-up required.

Appendix 1 – Case Report Form Information



RABIES CASE REPORT FORM

Unique ID: _____

OWNER AND VETERINARY CONTACT INFORMATION				
Owner Name:		Veterinarian Name:		
Owner Address:		Veterinarian Email:		
Owner Email:		Veterinarian Phone Numbers:		
Owner Phone Numbers:				
ANIMAL INFORMATION				
Animal Name/ID:	Species:	Breed:	Sex and Reproductive Status: Sex: F <input type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> Spayed/Neutered: YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>	Age:
EXPOSURE INFORMATION				
Date and Time of Exposure: Date (mm/dd/yyyy): Time:		Nature of Exposure:		
Geographic Location of Exposure (include travel):		Physical Location on Animal of Exposure:		
RABIES VACCINE HISTORY				
Previous Rabies Vaccine: YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>	Date(s) of Rabies Vaccine(s) (mm/dd/yyyy):			
ADDITIONAL EXPOSURES				
Other Animals Exposed: YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> If YES : Number of animals exposed: Herd information (if applicable):		Humans Exposed: YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> If YES : Number of humans exposed: Additional information:		
NOTIFICATIONS				
CPHO Notified: YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>		CFIA Notified: YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>		
Wildlife Notified: YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>		AVC Notified: YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>		

Notes: _____

Call taken by: _____ Date: _____

Version 1.0 - October 2022

Appendix 2 – Companion Animal – Owner Observation Form



RABIES INVESTIGATION OWNER OBSERVATION FORM

Unique ID:

Case Report Form ID:

OWNER AND VETERINARY CONTACT INFORMATION												
Owner Name:		Veterinarian Name:										
Owner Address:		Veterinarian Email:										
Owner Email:		Veterinarian Phone Numbers:										
Owner Phone Numbers:												
ANIMAL INFORMATION												
Animal Name/ID: (tag/microchip)	Species:	Breed: Color(s):	Sex and Reproductive Status: Sex: F <input type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> Spayed/Neutered: YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>	Age:								
OBSERVATION REQUIREMENTS												
Observation period: From (mm/dd/yyyy): To (mm/dd/yyyy) :		Clinical Signs of RABIES:										
Designated Caretaker (MUST be >18 yrs):		<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Abnormal behavior</td> <td>Wobbly</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Altered vocalization</td> <td>Seizures</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Difficulty eating/swallowing</td> <td>Excessive drooling</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Not eating</td> <td>Paralysis</td> </tr> </table>			Abnormal behavior	Wobbly	Altered vocalization	Seizures	Difficulty eating/swallowing	Excessive drooling	Not eating	Paralysis
		Abnormal behavior	Wobbly									
		Altered vocalization	Seizures									
		Difficulty eating/swallowing	Excessive drooling									
Not eating	Paralysis											
OFF OWNER'S PROPERTY/PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES												
Animal must be leashed OR harnessed AND muzzled when leaving owner's property. They must avoid contact with other animals and have minimal human contact.												
Animals are not permitted to be free roaming or attend obedience school, competitions or shows, dog park etc.												
RECORD KEEPING AND VISITATION												
Record keeping: Designated caretakers are required to maintain a logbook to record all human and animal contact with the above-noted animal. This must include the name of the individual/animal, date and time of contact, and nature of contact. This logbook will be reviewed periodically.		Visitation: Department of Agriculture and Land staff will arrange for at least one visit during the observation period to check compliance and monitor the health status of the animal.										
TERMINATION OF THE OBSERVATION PERIOD												
The animal must have a veterinary exam after the observation period is complete to confirm that absence of any clinical signs or ill health. The Provincial Veterinarian will be in contact with the designated veterinary to determine if the observation period can be terminated.												

Signed:

Date: _____

Provincial Veterinarian, Department of Agriculture and Land

October 2022 (v1.0)

Appendix 3 – Companion Animal – Quarantine

The goal of a rabies quarantine is to protect the public, including the animal owner, at all times; to protect any other susceptible animals from exposure to the quarantined animal, and to provide observation of the quarantined animal.

A quarantine guide should include details such as:

- disease of concern
- length of quarantine (start date and end date)
- location of quarantine premises and location of the animal on quarantine premises
- list of affected animals
- animal identification¹⁴ including;
 - type or class of animal, and unique markings and description
- owner/caretaker
- feeding and caring requirements
- designated veterinarian
- clinical signs associated with rabies
- visitation requirements
 - If accidental contact occurs between animals and humans that are not permanent household members, that event must be recorded with information such as the date and time of exposure and kept for the remainder of the quarantine period.
- reporting requirements
 - Any signs of disease or behavior change must be reported to the provincial veterinarian immediately.
 - Accidental contacts must be reported to the provincial veterinarian.
- contact number for the CPHO for human exposure
 - Any bites to human(s) must be reported to the CPHO immediately

Additional rules of quarantine:

No direct contact with persons outside the permanent members of the household.

No interaction with other animals. No free-roaming outdoors at any time. No leaving the premises. The animal must not be left unsupervised in a building/room or enclosure from which escape may reasonably be considered possible. The animal may go outside for basic exercise but must be kept muzzled, on leash, and under control at all times.

The results of a satisfactory veterinary physical examination are required for the Provincial Veterinarian to terminate a quarantine.

¹⁴ Identification must be present in form of microchip or tag (which may not be removed) during the length of the quarantine.

Appendix 4 – Livestock – Quarantine

The goal of a rabies quarantine is to protect the public by minimizing direct contact with people at all times; to protect any other susceptible animals from exposure outside the quarantined animal/group; to provide observation of the quarantined animal(s), and to ensure handler safety should neurological disease develop in the animal(s).

A quarantine guide will be written, which includes details such as:

- disease of concern
- length of quarantine (start date and end date)
- location of quarantine premises
- location of animal(s) on quarantine premises
- list of affected animals
- animal identification¹⁵ including:
 - type or class of animal
 - unique markings and description
- owner/caretaker
- feeding and caring requirements
- designated veterinarian
- clinical signs associated with rabies
- reporting requirements
 - Any signs of disease or behavior change must be reported to the provincial veterinarian immediately.
 - Accidental contacts must be reported to the provincial veterinarian.
- contact number for the CPHO for human exposure

Additional livestock facts concerning quarantine:

Meat: Livestock with no clinical signs consistent with rabies can be slaughtered for human consumption within seven days post-exposure. Afterward, they must complete the appropriate quarantine period before slaughter.

Milk: Milk from quarantined animals can continue to be used for processing, but should not be used in raw milk products.

Wool: Wool from quarantined animals can continue to be harvested, assuming necessary precautions are taken during the shearing process.

A satisfactory veterinary physical examination is required to terminate quarantine, and this will be determined by the Provincial Veterinarian.

¹⁵ Identification must be present in form of a tag (which may not be removed) during the length of the quarantine.

Appendix 5 – Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer Contact Information

Chief Veterinary Officer

Dr. Jill Wood

902-218-2665

jswood@gov.pe.ca

Reception

902-368-4880

902-368-5312