

Appendix B to Report 028-14

Middlesex-London Board of Health Meeting, April 24, 2014

Changes to Canadian Food Inspection Agency's Role in Rabies Investigations

Rabies is caused by a virus that spreads to humans through direct contact with the saliva of an infected animal, most often from licks, bites and scratches. If not treated in a timely fashion after exposure to an infected animal, rabies is almost invariably fatal in humans. Health Units in Ontario are required to follow-up on all potential human exposures to rabies in accordance with Rabies Prevention and Control Protocol under the Ontario Public Health Standards.

Health Unit staff assess the risk of all animal exposure incidents to determine what follow-up actions will be necessary such as animal confinement and observation; animal euthanasia and lab submission; immunization record verification of pets; and rabies post exposure prophylaxis (PEP). Staff conducted 822 rabies follow-up investigations in 2013, and 111 to the end of February in 2014. In most investigations, rabies can be ruled out through the confinement and observation of the suspected animal and the need for PEP is avoided. However, in some cases, an animal must undergo laboratory analysis to determine whether PEP is necessary.

Prior to April 1, 2014, Health Units have been utilizing the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) services for animal testing when a wild terrestrial animal is involved; when an animal exhibits symptoms consistent with rabies; or when an animal is sick, ill or unable to be confined for the 10 day observation period. Health Unit staff contacted the CFIA to make arrangements for the pick-up of the animal and the CFIA would then prepare and ship the specimen to the laboratory in Ottawa for testing.

In 2013, there were 148 animals submitted to the laboratory for rabies testing from Middlesex-London. Of those, 145 were found to be negative resulting in the avoidance of having to provide PEP to the individuals exposed, and 3 were found to be positive resulting in the timely provision of PEP when it was needed. To the end of February 2014, there have been 17 animal submissions, 16 being negative and one being positive.

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) has established a Rabies Management Task Group to seek input from Rabies Program Managers on a proposed specimen collection and delivery model for the future.

Until the new model is in place, the MOHLTC contingency plan during the transition period, effective April 1st, is as follows:

- 1) Health units will administer rabies PEP, based on an appropriate risk assessment, in all cases where rabies in an animal cannot be ruled out. Until Ontario has restored its full rabies specimen management capacity, this is the only means of ensuring that the risk of rabies transmission to humans is appropriately managed.

- 2) MOHLTC will ensure that health units have adequate supplies of rabies immunoglobulin (RIg) and rabies vaccine to perform PEP, until animal specimen collection, processing and shipment for rabies testing is again available.
- 3) Health Units will notify local veterinarians and animal shelters that euthanasia of animals prior to the end of the 10 day observation period following a biting incident should be limited to those cases where there are clear and significant animal welfare concerns in keeping the animal alive for the required period.

Local physicians, emergency departments, animal care and control workers, and veterinarians have been notified of the above changes by MLHU staff.