



## ANIMAL BITES AND RABIES Frequently Asked Questions

### **Why are you taking my animal?**

When a person is bitten by a domestic dog, cat, or ferret, NC General Statute §130A-196 requires that the animal be immediately confined for 10 days in a place designated by the local Health Director. The Durham County Health Director has designated the Animal Protection Society at 2117 East Club Blvd., Durham NC, 27704, as the site for confinement of biting animals.

### **Why is a 10 day confinement period necessary?**

The confinement period allows adequate time to observe the animal for signs and symptoms of rabies. Rabies is a very serious disease that affects the brain and spinal cord of mammals (if an animal has hair or fur, it is a mammal). Rabies is caused by a virus and almost always causes death. Rabies is usually a disease of animals, but it can spread from an infected animal to a person. It is usually spread through the bite of an animal that has the virus in its saliva. When an apparently healthy animal bites a person, there is a risk that the animal could have rabies, even if it was not exhibiting signs or symptoms of rabies at the time of the bite. (That is, the animal could have the rabies virus in its saliva). The 10-day confinement period ensures that the animal can be strictly observed at all times for signs of rabies. If the animal remains well during the 10 days, this indicates it did not have rabies 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. *The confinement period also avoids the need to destroy the biting animal in order to test its brain for the rabies virus.* The 10-day confinement and observation period for animals has proven to be an effective way to prevent human rabies.

### **But, my animal has been vaccinated. Does he still have to be confined?**

Yes, regardless of vaccination status, by law, *any* domestic dog, cat, or ferret that bites a person *must* be confined. The confinement period is a precaution against the possibility that an animal may appear healthy, but actually be sick with rabies and shedding rabies virus.

### **What are signs and symptoms of rabies in an animal?**

The first symptoms of rabies may be nonspecific and include lethargy, fever, vomiting, and loss of appetite. Signs progress within days and the animal may exhibit weakness, paralysis, seizures, difficulty breathing, difficulty swallowing, excessive salivation, abnormal behavior, aggression, and/or self-mutilation. But remember, it is possible for an apparently healthy animal that bites a person to have rabies, even if it was not exhibiting signs or symptoms of rabies at the time of the bite.

### **Can I confine my animal at home or at a veterinary hospital for the confinement period?**

Yes, *but only under certain conditions.* NC law states that the local Health Director *may* allow the owner to confine the animal at an alternative location, depending on the circumstance of the bite and if certain conditions of confinement, which are specified by the local Health Director, are in place.