Algorithm for Rabies Postexposure Prophylaxis (PEP) for Healthcare Providers and Public Health Professionals in Maryland

Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Outbreak Response Bureau, Center for Zoonotic and Vector-borne Diseases  2016

Report exposure to local health department, animal control, or police

Perform Risk Assessment
Risk assessment includes species, immunization status, health status, type & circumstances of exposure (bite vs. non-bite, provoked vs. unprovoked), & availability for quarantine or testing.

Was the person bitten or was an open wound or mucous membrane exposed to the saliva or neural tissue of a mammal?

Yes

Animal Species

Rabbit or small rodent (including squirrel, hamster, guinea pig, gerbil, chipmunk, rat, & mouse)

Captured?

Yes

Begin PEP if indicated by risk assessment (consult local health department).

Quarantine the animal for ≥10 days after the exposure

Did the animal exhibit signs of rabies during the quarantine?

Yes

Test the animal immediately: begin PEP if the animal tests positive or inconclusive.

No

Begin PEP

No

No PEP

No PEP Exception: bats

PEP is recommended for all persons with direct exposure to a bat, unless the bat tests negative for rabies. Without direct contact, the risks from bat exposure are low. It is possible to be unaware of a bat bite (e.g., a sleeping person awakens to find a bat in the room or an adult witnesses a bat in the room with a previously unattended child, mentally disabled person, or intoxicated person). PEP would not be automatically warranted for other household members.

Other mammals

Consult local health department

Raccoon, skunk, fox, bat, or woodchuck (groundhog)

Captured?

Yes

Begin PEP

No

No PEP

Dog, cat, ferret, or livestock (horse, cow, pig, sheep, & goat)

Captured?

Yes

Begin PEP

No

No PEP

In some situations, it may be appropriate to initiate PEP before test results are available (such as for a bite to the face by a stray animal or rabies vector species); consult your local health department.

Rabbits & small rodents are almost never found to be infected with rabies & have not been known to transmit rabies to humans. Woodchucks (groundhogs) account for most cases of rabies in rodents. Rabies testing of rodents is rarely recommended either, unless the animal bit a person and appeared ill or was behaving aggressively or unusually.