

Guidance Document for Animal Bite Reports

When an individual arrives at the clinic for treatment after an animal bite, the clinic should ensure they fill out an Animal Bite Investigation Form for the incident, to be returned to the health department.

The first question asked is if the bite has been reported to law enforcement or another medical office. If so, it must be determined if the person has already filled out an animal bite report. If they have already done so, then there will be no need to fill out another form.

The purpose of collecting this information on the form is to ensure that the owner of the animal quarantines it for a period of 14 days, during which time the animal's health must be monitored with any odd behavior or illness reported to this department. An animal does not need to be locked in a cage during the entire quarantine period. The "quarantine" simply means that the animal shall not be allowed to roam freely to prevent a situation where the animal becomes missing during the quarantine period and we cannot determine if the animal became sick due to rabies or disappeared from other factors (i.e. became lost, hit by a car, etc.) Sometimes, the person bitten is reluctant to provide information about the owner of the animal fearing the dog warden will take the dog away or the owner will be further prosecuted; however, our office is only concerned with ensuring the animal did not have rabies at the time of the bite to prevent the person bitten from becoming infected as well. Our office does not get involved with who is to blame for the bite or why it occurred in most cases. The only times that our office may consider extenuating circumstances that led up to a bite would be when it involved an obviously ill or wild animal that could indicate a higher likelihood of rabies.

Any further questions regarding medical treatment will be referred to a physician for a final decision. Generally speaking, when bites involve wild, feral domestic, or ill animals, the person should be advised to begin the rabies prophylaxis treatment, especially if the animal cannot be located for rabies testing. If the animal can be located and euthanized, our office can send the animal in for rabies testing with results returned within 1-2 days in most circumstances. Rabies is not common in Mercer County, but it does exist as we have had bats test positive for the virus in recent years. It is also important to keep in mind that the rabies virus is fatal if left untreated; therefore, it should be taken seriously even if it does not frequently occur here.