

Jan. 30, 2024

## Skunk Variant Rabies Detected in Clark County

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The Indiana Department of Health (IDOH) **detected skunk variant rabies on Jan. 23 in a skunk collected from Clark County.** Skunk variant rabies has not been found in Indiana since 2004 but is endemic in northern Kentucky. This finding updates recommendations for treatment of patients with high-risk exposures to dogs and cats in this area.

Clinicians treating **patients with exposure to animals in Clark, Floyd and Harrison counties should follow the below recommendations.** Recommendations for treatment have not changed for exposures in other geographic areas. However, if concerned, clinicians are encouraged to reach out to their local health department or IDOH.

### **For patients with high-risk exposure to dogs or cats in Clark, Floyd and Harrison counties:**

- Consider rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (rPEP) for patients with high-risk exposures to dogs or cats in Clark, Floyd, and Harrison counties if the animal cannot be quarantined or tested for rabies, especially if the bite was unprovoked, the animal appeared ill, or the animal was behaving abnormally.
- IDOH is working with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources to conduct surveillance to determine the extent to which skunk variant rabies is circulating in the area, beginning with Clark, Floyd and Harrison counties.

### **For patients with dog or cat bite exposures in other Indiana counties:**

- IDOH does not have sufficient evidence to alter public health recommendations for healthcare providers treating patients with exposures in other Indiana counties where most dog and cat bites should continue to be considered low-risk exposures, especially if the bite was provoked and the animal appeared healthy and was behaving normally

### **For all patients with high-risk exposure to rabies:**

- Clinicians should follow the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices \(ACIP\)](#) for Rabies for post-exposure risk assessment and rPEP administration.
- Continue to administer rPEP for high-risk exposures to bats, skunks, raccoons, foxes, and other wild carnivores in all Indiana counties if the animal cannot be tested for rabies.
- If the biting animal is available for quarantine or testing, continue to consider delaying rPEP until results are available.
- Continue to administer rPEP judiciously. Administration of rPEP for low-risk exposures is unnecessary and can reduce the availability of biologics for patients with high-risk exposures.

- Report all animal bites or exposures and any initiation of rPEP to IDOH. Animal bite reports and any additional accompanying information can be faxed to IDOH at 317-234-2812.
- If desired, contact your [local health department](#) or IDOH for public health recommendations regarding rPEP for individual patients.
  - Business hours (8:15 a.m.–4:45 p.m., M–F): 317-233-7125
  - After business hours: 317-233-1325. Follow prompts to speak with the epidemiologist on call.

### **Rabies epidemiology**

Rabies is a fatal viral infection that is primarily spread in saliva through the bite of an infected animal. While bat variant rabies is endemic throughout the continental United States, the presence of skunk variant rabies in an area can increase the risk of rabies for both animals and people.

### **Resources**

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) [Recommendations for Human Rabies Prevention](#)
- Report sick or dead skunks to the Indiana Department of Natural Resources Division of Fish & Wildlife Health Program at [on.IN.gov/sickwildlife](https://on.IN.gov/sickwildlife)

