

# Animal Bites

The role and responsibilities of  
Town Health Officers

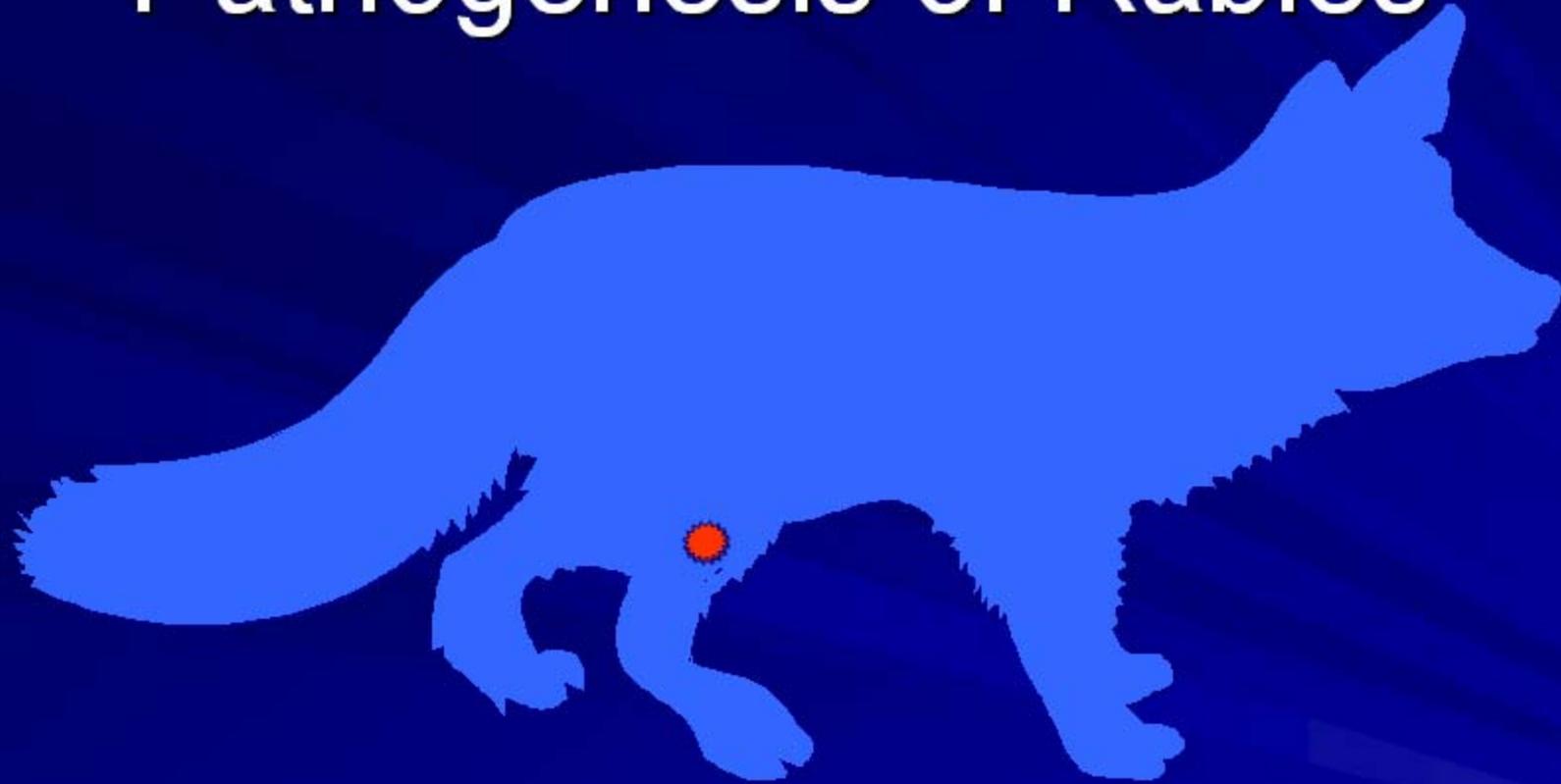
# What is rabies?

- Rabies is a fatal viral disease that affects humans and other mammals.
- People get rabies by and large from the bite of an animal with rabies.
- People can also be exposed to the virus when saliva from an infected animal gets into a fresh open wound, or into a person's eyes, nose or mouth.

# Incubation and Infectious Periods

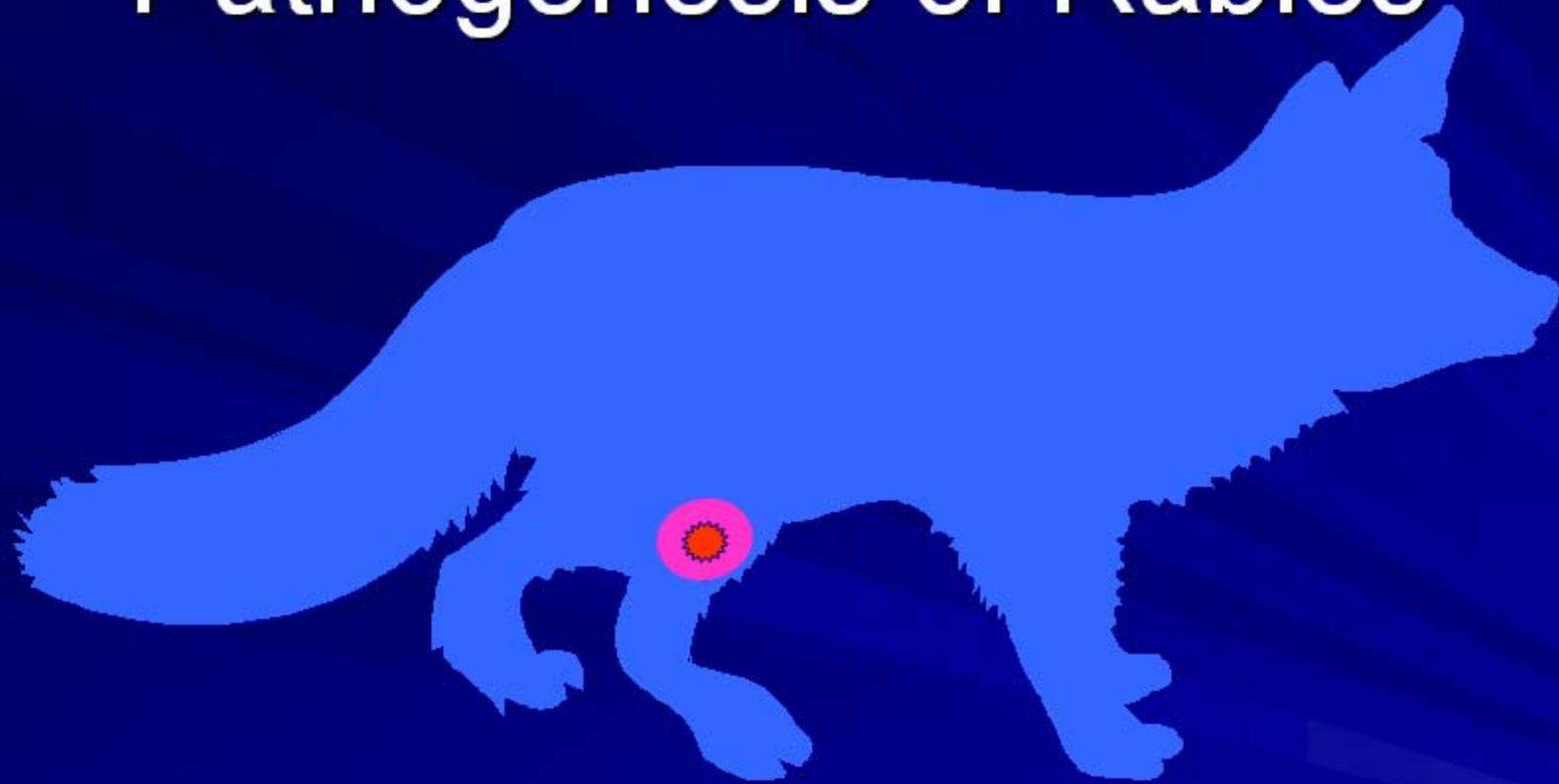
- It takes several days up to several months for the rabies virus to *incubate* in an animal.
- That is, to travel from the site of the bite to the brain and into the saliva, at which point the animal becomes *infectious*.
- Once infectious, an animal generally dies within days, which is why an animal is observed for 10 days to make sure it is alive and healthy.

# Pathogenesis of Rabies



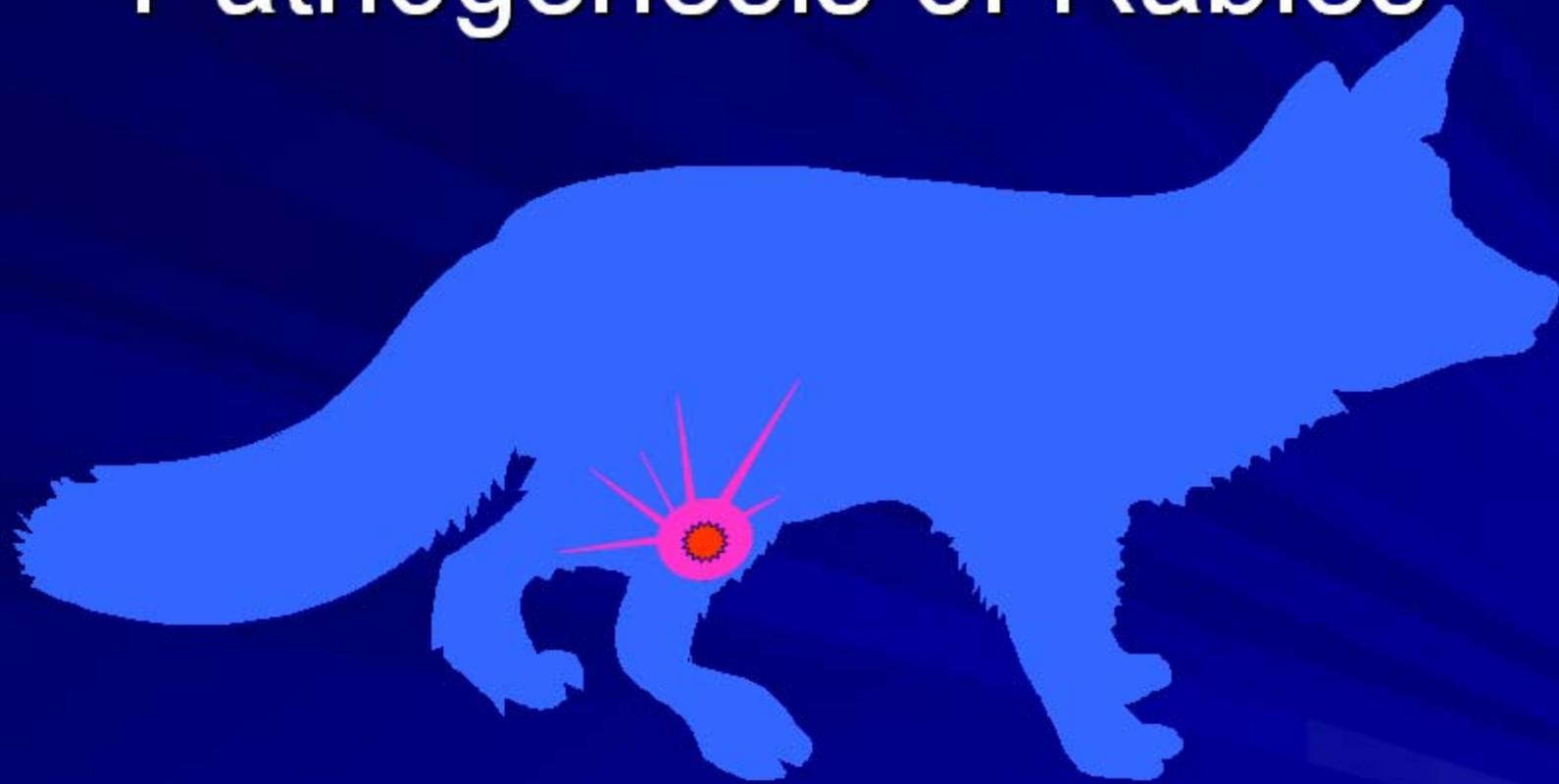
A rabid animal bites the victim, introducing virus from the saliva into the muscle tissue.

# Pathogenesis of Rabies



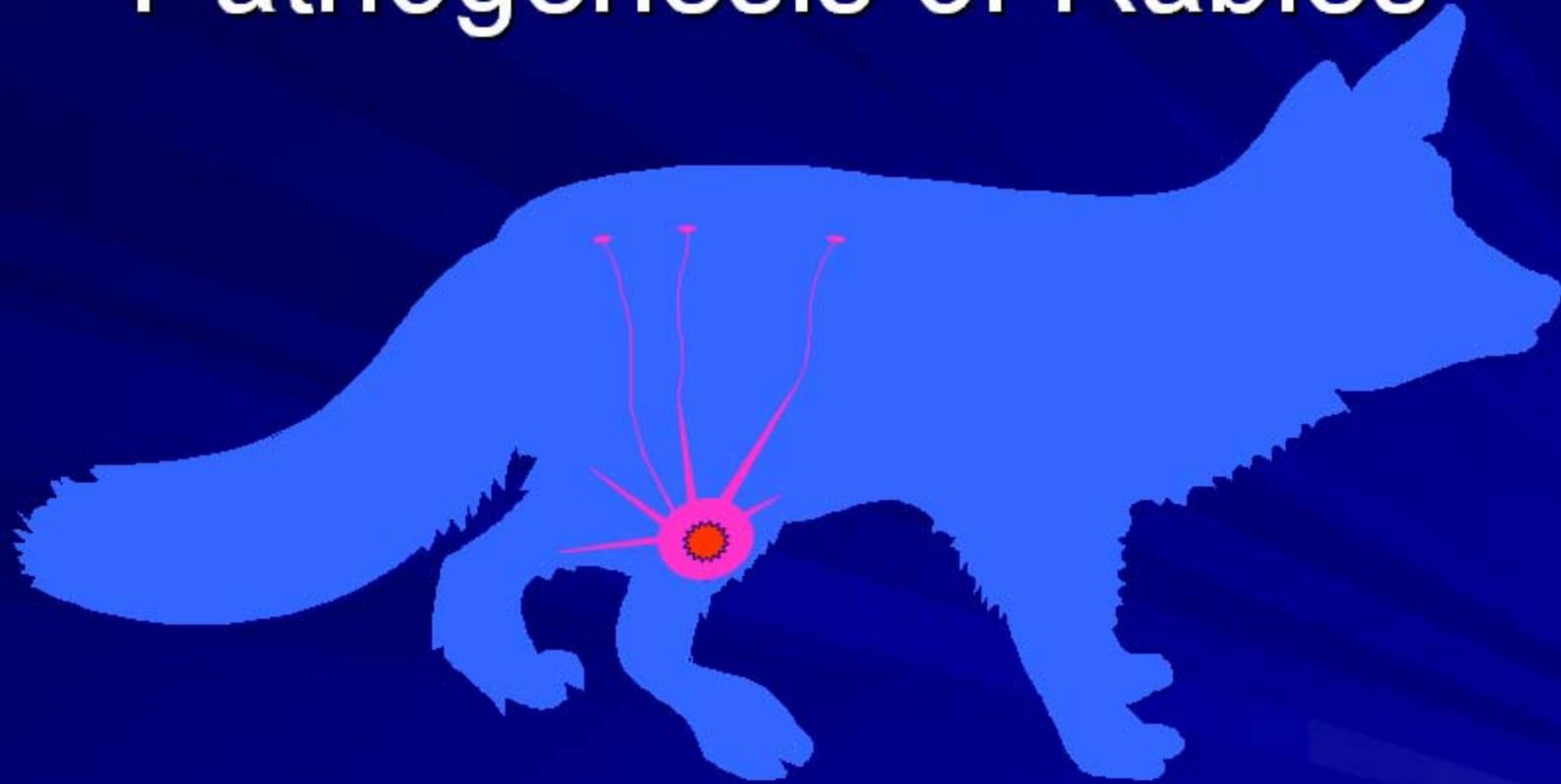
Virus grows in the muscle tissue in the area of the bite.

# Pathogenesis of Rabies



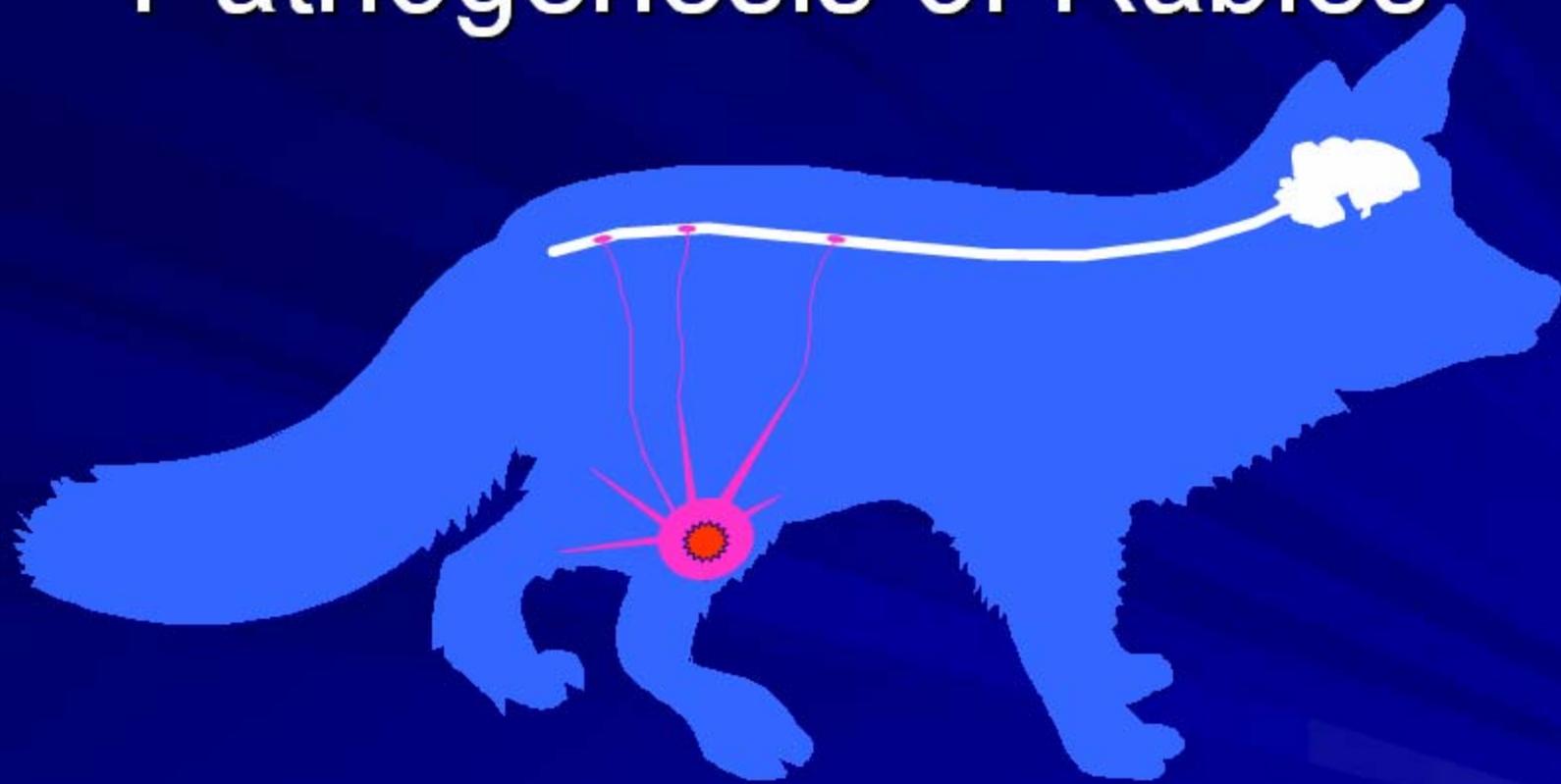
Virus infects the sensory and motor nerves serving the infected muscle.

# Pathogenesis of Rabies



Virus travels from peripheral nerves to the central nervous system.

# Pathogenesis of Rabies



Virus migrates throughout the central nervous system, arriving at the brain.



# Rabies Vaccination

- By law, all cats, dogs and ferrets in Vermont must receive regular rabies shots.
- Owners of all domestic dogs and wolf-hybrids more than six months old must license the animal in their town clerk's office.

# Animal Bites

- Health care providers are required to report bites of animals that could be subject to rabies to the Health Officer within 24 hours (Vermont Communicable Disease Regulations 4- 401a)
- Information required to be given on person bitten:
  - Name
  - Age
  - Address

# Health Officers Responsibilities

- Contact the victim and the owner of the animal to investigate the incident;
- Complete the “Animal Bite Report Form”;
  - The completed Animal Bite Report should be kept with town records.
- Determine the animal’s rabies vaccination status;
- Require that the animal be confined and observed for ten days to determine whether the animal is healthy.

# Animal Bite Report Form

## ANIMAL BITE REPORT FORM

TOWN: \_\_\_\_\_ HEALTH OFFICER: \_\_\_\_\_

ANIMAL INVOLVED:  DOG  CAT \_\_\_\_\_ (OTHER)

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ TIME: \_\_\_\_\_  A.M.  P.M.

ANIMAL FOUND:  YES  NO

LOCATION OF BITE ON VICTIM'S BODY: \_\_\_\_\_

PROVOKED BITE:  YES  NO  UNKNOWN

NAME OF VICTIM: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_ TELEPHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

DOCTOR CONTACTED: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_ TELEPHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

OWNER OF ANIMAL (IF ANY): \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_ TELEPHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

VETERINARIAN: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_ TELEPHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE OF LAST RABIES SHOT: \_\_\_\_\_ RABIES TAG NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_ IF NONE:

ACTION TAKEN BY HEALTH OFFICER: \_\_\_\_\_

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_

# Animal Confinement for 10 Days

- The local health officer shall cause an apparently healthy domestic animal that bites an individual, regardless of vaccination status, to be confined and observed for 10 days for signs of illness. (VT Communicable Disease Regs 4-403.2)
- Confinement and observation may be carried out at the residence of a responsible animal owner.
- In general, confinement means that the animal should be under the control of the owner at all times. The animal should not be running loose or be exposed to numerous individuals or children.

# 10 Day Confinements

- If the Health Officer feels that the owner will not be able to confine the animal appropriately, it can be confined in a facility at the owner's expense.
- During the 10 days, it is the responsibility of the THO to check on the health of the animal.
- At the end of the 10 days, the THO needs to observe the animal to verify that the animal is alive and to call the victim with that information.
- Any questions regarding confinement should be referred to Dr. Bob Johnson, State Public Health Veterinarian.

# Other Confinements

- Domestic animal is bitten by another animal, usually a wild animal that is not available for testing and is suspected to have rabies.
  - If domestic animal is unvaccinated for rabies, requires confinement of 6 months or euthanasia.
- Decisions regarding these situations are *always* made by the State Public Health Veterinarian.

# Rabies Testing

- Following the death of an animal that is suspected of having rabies, the remains are commonly sent to the Vermont Department of Health Laboratory for rabies testing.
- There is no charge for testing the animal. The owner is responsible for any veterinarian charges.
- If a Health Officer is requested to assist in this process, he or she should first contact the State Public Health Veterinarian at (800) 640-4374 for direction on how to proceed.

# Help

Please call the State Public Health Veterinarian at the Vermont Department of Health.

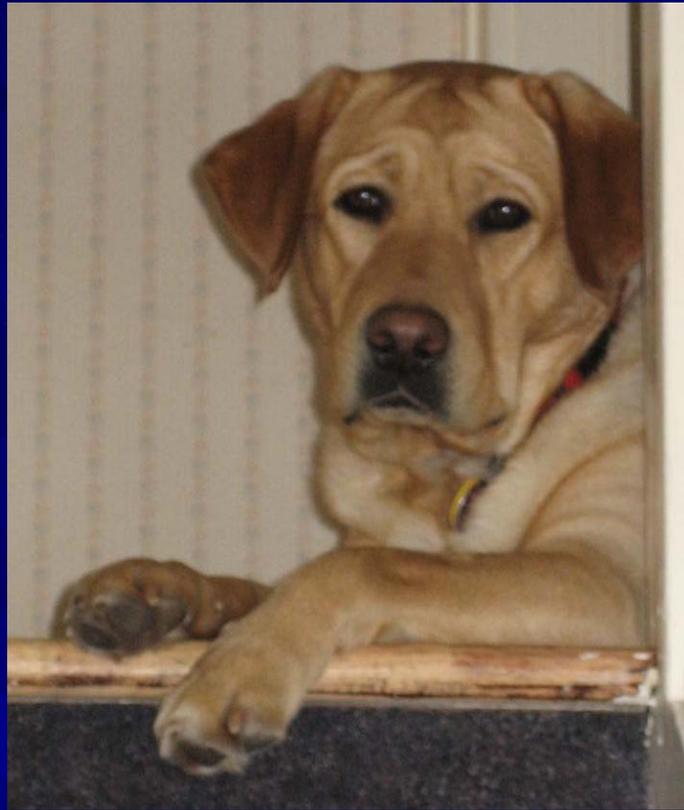
1 – 800 – 640 - 4374

These situations are often very complex, confusing, tricky, anxiety-provoking for everyone involved.

It is important to seek guidance.

# Other Resources

- Vermont Rabies Hotline/USDA Wildlife Services 800-4-RABIES (800-472-2437)
- Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets, Animal Health Section (for livestock) 802-828-2421
- Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife Game Wardens 802-241-3727
- Vermont Rabies Control Manual :  
<http://healthvermont.gov/prevent/rabies/Rabies.aspx>



**Questions?**