

Animal Bite Prevention Strategies in Windsor-Essex County (2025)

ISSUE

Human injuries from animal bites are a major public health issue. These bites can lead to rabies exposures, a viral disease that is almost always fatal in humans if not treated promptly as well as cause severe infections and psychological trauma. Preventive measures such as responsible pet ownership, rigorous animal control measures, and pet vaccinations can help to reduce the number of animal bites and rabies exposures.

BACKGROUND

Rabies is a reportable disease in Ontario which is investigated in accordance with the [Health Protection and Promotion Act](#), the [Management of Potential Rabies Exposures Guideline](#), and the [Rabies Prevention and Control Protocol](#). Local public health units evaluate probable rabies exposure cases within 24 hours of notice, assessing risk, advising post exposure prophylaxis (PEP) where needed, and organizing testing or confinement of affected animals.

The Windsor-Essex County Health Unit (WECHU) has investigated approximately 2600 animal bite cases (in humans) in Windsor and Essex County (WEC) from 2022 to 2024, 92% of which involved canine and feline species.

A 2020 University of Guelph study found individuals living in a city are twice as likely to be bit by a dog compared to those living in the rural areas. Approximately 60% of all bites occurred while playing or interacting with the dog. The study also indicated that 77% of the dogs that bit were unleashed and approximately 17% were not vaccinated against rabies.¹ According to Government of Canada, the high-risk groups that get bitten the most are include children, people who work with animals and the people who are outdoors.²

In Ontario and across Canada, animal control is managed by municipal governments. Currently, all municipalities in WEC have by-laws for animal control which include licensing, leashing, maximum number of pets permitted per household, and breed-specific legislation. Evidence shows that increased enforcement for off-leash infractions and increased signage at parks, trails and dog parks could help reduce animal bite incidents. The signs should provide clear information about the dangers of rabies as well as what to do in the event of a bite or scratch from an animal, obtain animal owner information, cleaning the wound and reporting the incident to the health unit.

Successful exposure prevention efforts require positive changes in public behaviour and increased awareness of leashing requirements as a way to promote responsible pet ownership. A proactive community education and awareness campaign can support enforcement and compliance with the goal of reducing the occurrence of animal bites as well as increase in rabies vaccination rates for animals.

Timely and complete reporting of animal bites is an essential component of a successful rabies prevention program. Under [O. Reg. 557 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act](#), there is a requirement that a physician, registered nurse in the extended class, veterinarian, police officer or any other person who has information of any animal bite or other animal contact with a human must notify the Medical Officer of Health (MOH). Prompt reporting of animal bites and/or contact

assists the public health unit in the decision to recommend post-exposure prophylaxis treatment to prevent potential risk of rabies transmission to humans. The health unit works closely with municipalities, veterinarians, healthcare providers as well as police services to provide information for reporting and investigation. In response to the recent human rabies case in Ontario, additional engagement with local primary care providers will take place to ensure all providers are confident with strategies to assess rabies exposure risks and administer post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP).

PROPOSED MOTION

WHEREAS, animal bites to humans increase the risk of rabies virus transmission which can be fatal if left untreated; and

WHEREAS, data indicates that approximately 92% of local animal to human bite investigations involved canine and feline species, emphasizing the need for responsible pet ownership and up-to-date rabies vaccinations for pets; and

WHEREAS, animal bites affect vulnerable populations such as children, people working with animals, people who are outdoors, as well as people living and working in urban areas disproportionately; and

WHEREAS, a proactive community education and awareness campaigns can effectively promote compliance with leashing requirements and vaccination regulations; and

WHEREAS, the WECHU is committed to ongoing collaborations with local municipalities, veterinarians, healthcare providers as well as police services to provide information on accurate and complete reporting of animal bites.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT, that the Windsor-Essex County Board of Health recommends that WEC municipalities support ongoing education, prevention and advocacy efforts related to animal bite and rabies prevention activities;

AND FURTHER THAT, the Windsor-Essex County Board of Health encourages all local municipalities to review, strengthen and enforce existing animal control by-laws, including off-leash violations.

References:

1. Julien, D. A., Sargeant, J. M., Filejski, C., & Harper, S. L. (2020). Ouch! A cross-sectional study investigating self-reported human exposure to dog bites in rural and urban households in southern Ontario, Canada. *Zoonoses and public health*, 67(5), 554–565. <https://doi.org/10.1111/zph.12719>
2. Government of Canada (2024). *Rabies for health professionals*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/rabies/for-health-professionals.html>