Rabies is a serious and deadly zoonotic disease. Veterinary technicians will be asked questions about rabies transmission. You should expect questions about this topic on your board exam.

**Key Points**

- **Behavior change** and/or vocalization are key signs that should lead you to think about rabies
- **Reportable** disease
- Specific testing and quarantine rules apply for animals exposed to rabies or that bite humans

**Relevant Background**

There are various reservoirs for the disease, primarily wildlife. Most human rabies cases come from bats. Indoor and outdoor animals are at risk.

**Clinical Signs**

- Behavior change or vocalization are the 2 major signs.
  - Examples of behavior changes include aggression, excitability or irritability, hiding (wild animals may become less fearful of humans).
- May see lameness.
- Acute or progressive signs.
- The disease may remain asymptomatic for 1-2 months.
- The “dumb” and “furious” forms of the disease may only be present in the terminal stages.
  - Furious form - Animals become anxious and aggressive. Progresses to seizures or paralysis.
  - Dumb form - Hypersalivation and difficulty swallowing.

**Diagnosis**

The **Direct Fluorescent Antibody** Test detects viral antigens and should be tested on two locations from the brain (brainstem and cerebellum) and is the **test of choice** for rabies diagnosis.
Management of Bites

- Exposed unvaccinated pets
  - Euthanasia and testing OR
  - Vaccinate immediately AND quarantine for 4 months (dogs & cats) or 6 months (ferrets)
- Exposed and currently vaccinated pets
  - 45-day Observation AND immediate revaccination
- Exposed and previously vaccinated pets (but that have an expired or outdated rabies vaccine status)
  - 45-day Observation AND immediate revaccination
- Exposed humans
  - Post exposure prophylaxis with rabies immunoglobulin AND
  - Vaccinate at 0 and 3 days
  - If a pet animal bit a human, it must be quarantined for 10 days or euthanized for rabies testing

References

- Centers for disease control (CDC) website, Rabies.