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## Rabies awareness

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victims. The virus is found in the brain on post-mortem examination.

Animals infected with rabies can show unusual behavior. Wildlife animals might act unafraid of people, approaching individuals in parks or on trails. Nocturnal species such as skunks and bats might become more active during the day. Bats might be unable to fly, and other animals might have difficulty walking, drinking or eating.

Rabies virus is found on every continent except Antarctica, and is responsible for approximately 59,000 human deaths each year worldwide. Exposure to rabid dogs is still the number one cause of human rabies death.

The incidence of rabies in the United States is much lower than in other countries. According to the Centers for Disease Control, the number of human deaths has decreased from about 100 each year in the early 1900s, to just a couple per year. This current low incidence is a direct result of successful programs in vaccinating domestic animals, as well as to the availability of rabies treatment (post-exposure prophylaxis) for humans.

Currently, more than 90% of the 5,000 animal rabies cases reported each year in the USA involve wildlife. Prior to 1960, the majority of animal cases involved domestic animals, including dogs.

Many people believe that we do not have rabies in "our area." However, according to the California Department of Public Health 2018 report, our state had 225 cases reported. Most species were bats and skunks; a few others included fox and raccoon. In Contra Costa County, 5 bats were reported; Alameda County had 2 bats and Marin County had 7 bats reported. There was not a single reported case of a dog or cat. This is not because these species cannot get rabies disease - this more accurately reflects the importance and success of vaccination programs.

Current California law states that dogs should be vaccinated as young as 3 months old. Cats are not legally mandated to be vaccinated, but many standard vaccine protocols consider rabies vaccine to be a "core" (nonoptional) vaccine for cats, including those published by UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine. Cats can also receive this vaccine at 3 months old. The vaccine is very safe and protective.

I was recently reminded of the importance of pet vaccination when a client called to report he had submitted a bat found in his cabin to Plumas County officials and was awaiting the rabies test result. He wanted guidance about his dog's rabies vaccine status. Luckily, his dog is up to date on its rabies vaccine, so no further action was required. (Also, luckily, the bat tested negative.)

The importance of vaccinating domestic animals, including all indoor cats, cannot be overstated. The vaccine guards against a mandate of euthanasia for a suspected pet victim, as well as protects the humans in the household. Most likely, a quarantine period (generally one to six months) will be mandated in the case of suspect exposure if the pet is current on its rabies vaccine. However, if the pet is not current on rabies vaccine, and there is sufficient reason to believe exposure has occurred, this is a public health hazard and euthanasia/brain testing can be ordered. Rabies is a disease that needs to be reported to the Center for Disease Control, and is not treated in animals.

Here are some informative websites:

<https://www.cdc.gov/worldrabiesday/index.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/rabies/location/index.html>

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/ReportedAnimalRabies.aspx>

<https://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/hospital/animal-health-topics/vaccination-guidelines>



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