



ACCREDITED LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY



# COUNTY OF ALBEMARLE POLICE DEPARTMENT

## Rabies Awareness NEWS RELEASE – September 24, 2009

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FAX TO: LOCAL MEDIA

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9/24/09 Authority: Lt. Todd Hopwood

The Albemarle County Police Department's Animal Control Unit in a coordinated effort with the Virginia Department of Health and the local SPCA would like to remind citizens that next week is Rabies Awareness Week (September 28 to October 4).

With the recent reports of potentially rabid animals that received media attention, this is a timely reminder about the rabies disease and the preventative measures to take to minimize the risk of human or animal exposure. One of the best ways to prevent the disease in companion animals is to have those pets vaccinated. Rabies can be prevented in cats, dogs, and ferrets, as well as some livestock with a rabies vaccination. With that in mind, the Charlottesville / Albemarle SPCA is providing a rabies vaccine clinic on Sunday September 27, 2009 between 11AM and 3PM (a flier is attached to this release). The cost is \$10.00 per vaccine.

The Virginia Department of Health has provided a list of answers to commonly asked questions about rabies (attached).

### Facts about Rabies

- Rabies is a deadly disease caused by a virus that attacks the nervous system. It kills almost any mammal or human that gets sick from it.
- The rabies virus is mainly in the saliva and brain of rabid animals. It can be transmitted through a bite or by getting saliva or brain tissue in an open wound, eyes, or mouth.
- Getting saliva on the surface of intact skin does not cause rabies. Nor can you get rabies simply by petting an animal.
- Only mammals get rabies. Skunks, bats, foxes, and raccoons are most likely to get rabies.
- Rabies can be prevented in cats, dogs, and ferrets, and some livestock with a rabies vaccination.
- Because of improved rabies vaccination programs for pets and better treatment for people who are bitten, rabies cases among humans in this country are rare.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT: LT. TODD HOPWOOD AT 434-972-4037

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## What to do if you are bitten by an animal

- Wash the wound thoroughly with soap and lots of water. Give first aid as you would for any wound.
- If it can be done safely, capture the animal. Contact animal control for assistance.
- If the animal cannot be captured, try to memorize its appearance (size, color, etc) and where it went after biting you so that you can report the information to animal control.
- **Vaccination is not 100% effective in preventing rabies in pets. If an owner states his/her pet is vaccinated, you still want to get the owner's contact information. Dogs, cats, and ferrets are usually confined for 10 days to observe their behavior.**
- Contact your physician immediately and explain how you got the bite. Your doctor will want to know if the animal has been captured.
- **Report the bite to the local health department. If necessary, you will be assessed for rabies post exposure prophylaxis. A person who is exposed and has never been vaccinated against rabies should get 5 doses of rabies vaccine – one dose right away, and additional doses on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 28<sup>th</sup> days. They should also get a shot of *Rabies Immune Globulin* at the same time as the first dose. This gives immediate protection.**
- Prompt and appropriate treatment after being bitten and before the disease develops can stop rabies infection and prevent the disease.

## What to do when your pet bites someone

- Tell the person to wash the wound thoroughly with soap and lots of water and to see a doctor immediately.
- Provide the victim with important information including your name, address and information about your pet's most recent rabies vaccination.
- Contact your local health department or local animal control.
- If your pet is a dog, cat, or ferret you will probably have to confine your pet and watch it closely for 10 days.
- Report any illness or unusual behavior by your pet to the local health department and to your veterinarian immediately.

## What to do when your pet gets bitten by another animal

- If it can be done safely, capture the animal. Contact animal control for assistance.
- Consult your veterinarian immediately and have your veterinarian examine your pet and assess your pet's vaccination needs.
- Dogs, cats, or ferrets with a current vaccination should be revaccinated immediately, kept under the owner's control, and observed for a period as specified by state law.
- Dogs, cats, or ferrets with expired vaccinations will need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.
- Dogs, cats, or ferrets that have never been vaccinated and are exposed to a rabid animal may need to be euthanized or placed in strict isolation for six months.
- Contact the local health department.

## Bats and Rabies

- Bats have small teeth which may leave marks that are not easily seen.
- **Although many people know if they have been bitten by a bat, there are certain circumstances when a person might not be aware or unable to tell you that they have been bitten. These circumstances include:**
  - If a sleeping person awakes to find a bat in the room
  - If you find a bat in a room with an unattended child
  - If you see a bat near a person with disabilities
  - If you see a bat near a person who is intoxicated

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- In these circumstances, safely capture the bat for rabies testing. If the bat tests positive for rabies, or is unavailable for testing, the person should seek medical advice regarding the need for post exposure prophylaxis.
- Contact your local health department for assistance with animal testing and medical advice.

## **Rabies prevention starts with the animal owner**

- All dogs, cats and ferrets should be vaccinated against rabies and should be kept current. Consider vaccinating valuable livestock and horses. Animals that have frequent contact with humans should be vaccinated.
- Even if you consider your cat, dog, or ferret an indoor pet you should still vaccinate your pet because wild animals (especially bats) often get indoors or your pet could get outside when a door is opened.
- Pet owners can reduce the possibility of pets being exposed to rabies by not letting them roam free.
- Spaying or neutering your pet may reduce any tendency they might have to roam or fight and thus reduce the chance that they will be exposed to rabies.

## **Reduce the risk of exposure to rabies from wildlife**

- Vaccinate your pets and other domestic animals against rabies.
- Don't feed or water your pets outside. Even empty bowls will attract wild and stray animals.
- Keep your garbage securely covered. Open garbage will attract wild or stray animals.
- Wild animals should not be kept as pets.
- Enjoy all wild animals from a distance. Never handle unfamiliar animals – even if they appear friendly.
- Alert the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries or a licensed wildlife rehabilitator if you see wildlife that is acting strangely, appears to be orphaned, or injured and do not take matters into your own hands.
- **Animals that have rabies may act differently than they would normally. They may be more likely to attack or may look like they are sick. They do not always drool or “foam at the mouth”. Animals that are usually out only at night may be seen during the day. They may act aggressive or lose their fear of humans. Sometimes, however, animals may look normal and still have rabies.**
- Bat-proof your home and other structures in the fall and winter to prevent bats from nesting and having access to people.

## **Who Should I Contact If I Have Questions?**

- Local Health Department
- Local Animal Control (434) 971-9041 or 911 in an emergency