

Monterey County Health Department Preparedness Minute

August 2006

A Reminder about Rabies in Monterey County

Residents of Monterey County are reminded about the ongoing public health threat presented by rabid wildlife in our community.



Rabies is a preventable viral disease of mammals most often transmitted through the bite of a rabid animal. It infects the central nervous system, causing encephalopathy and ultimately death. Once symptoms develop, rabies is fatal. The vast majority of rabies cases reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) each year occur in wild animals like raccoons, skunks, bats, and foxes.



Rabies can be transmitted through the saliva of an animal or human into a break in the skin or through a mucous membrane. However, it is important to realize that a *bite need not occur* for the rabies virus to be

transmitted.

Unfortunately, rabies among certain species of wildlife (particularly, skunks, and bats, and wild carnivores, such as foxes) is endemic (always here) to California. These species have become host carriers and often don't show initial signs.

It is highly unusual for skunks, bats, raccoons or opossums to be seen during clear, sunny daylight hours.

This behavior should be viewed as suspicious and may indicate the presence of a rabies infection. Do not touch or approach the animal. If any of these wild animals are seen acting abnormal or appearing ill, call Animal Services at (831) 769-8850.



Domestic animals, including our own companion dogs and cats are at risk for rabies in Monterey County, which is why the County Ordinance requires all dogs and cats over 4 months of age be vaccinated against rabies and dogs be licensed. Having a currently licensed dog ensures that it has been properly vaccinated. Domestic animals are at increased risk of rabies if they are not protected by a rabies vaccination, and if they are allowed contact with wildlife.

In addition to ensuring that their pets have been properly vaccinated and licensed, residents are advised to discourage wildlife from roaming near by not leaving pet food outside at night and properly securing trash containers. Feeding of wildlife, with the exception of bird feeders, is not permitted at any time.



Avoid contact with wildlife AT ALL TIMES and if you think *you or your pets* have been exposed to rabies, contact the Monterey County Health Department's Animal Services Division IMMEDIATELY at 831-769-8850, ext.3.

The purpose of this short publication is to inform Monterey County residents about preparedness issues ranging from emerging communicable diseases to personal preparedness. If there is a specific topic you or your staff are interested in please contact the Preparedness Program at klahnk@co.monterey.ca.us.



Frequently Asked Questions About Rabies

Q: How do people get rabies?

A: People usually get rabies from the bite of a rabid animal. It is also possible, but quite rare, that people may get rabies if infectious material from a rabid animal, such as saliva, gets directly into their eyes, nose, mouth, or a wound.

Q: Can I get rabies in any way other than an animal bite?

A: Non-bite exposures to rabies are very rare. Scratches, abrasions, open wounds, or mucous membranes contaminated with saliva or other potentially infectious material (such as brain tissue) from a rabid animal constitute non-bite exposures. Occasionally reports of non-bite exposure are such that postexposure prophylaxis is given.

Contact with the blood, urine or feces (e.g., guano) of a rabid animal, does not constitute an exposure and is not an indication for prophylaxis.

Q: How soon after an exposure should I seek medical attention?

A: Contact your physician IMMEDIATELY as medical assistance should be obtained as soon as possible after an exposure. There have been no vaccine failures in the United States (i.e., someone developed rabies) when postexposure prophylaxis (PEP) was given promptly and appropriately after an exposure. But again, once symptoms appear, rabies is fatal. Do not delay in treatment.

Q: What medical attention do I need if I am exposed to rabies?

A: According to the CDC, one of the most effective methods to decrease the chances for infection involves thorough washing of the wound with soap and water. Specific medical attention for someone exposed to rabies is called postexposure prophylaxis or PEP. In the United States, postexposure prophylaxis consists of a regimen of one dose of immune globulin and five doses of rabies vaccine over a 28-day period. Rabies immune globulin and the first dose of rabies vaccine should be given by your health care provider as soon as possible after exposure. Additional doses of rabies vaccine should be given on days 3, 7, 14, and 28 after the first vaccination. Current vaccines are relatively painless and are given in your arm, like a flu or tetanus vaccine (not in the stomach anymore).

Q: What happens if my pet (cat, dog) is bitten by a wild animal?

A: Contact your veterinarian and/or Monterey County Animal Services immediately! Any animal bitten or scratched by either a wild, carnivorous mammal or a bat should be regarded as having been exposed to rabies.

CALIFORNIA STATE LAW REQUIRES THAT ANY DOMESTIC ANIMAL EXPOSED TO RABIES BE PLACED INTO QUARANTINE BASED ON WHETHER IT HAS A CURRENT RABIES VACCINATION AND/OR THE WILD ANIMAL IS AVAILABLE FOR TESTING. ANIMAL SERVICES IS THE AGENCY THAT WOULD DETERMINE THE BEST PROTOCOL FOR EACH CASE.

For more information about rabies visit the Centers for Disease Control website at www.cdc.gov

Source: Centers for Disease Control, National Center for Infectious Diseases



This issue of *Preparedness Minute* is brought to you by the Monterey County Health Department's Preparedness Program. For more information Contact:

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