

## **Rabies: Why your Dog Needs this Vaccination**

*Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff*



### **WORLD RABIES DAY: SEPTEMBER 28**

The very mention of rabies triggers alarm, and it is accurate to state that the concerns are well founded.

Every year, on September 28th, World Rabies Day helps keep people around the world aware that rabies is still a global risk and that someday it may be possible to eliminate rabies. Why not make this the day you check that your pet's rabies vaccine is up to date?

#### **HOW IS RABIES TRANSMITTED?**

The rabies virus is shed in the saliva and transmitted through the bite of an infected animal. It spreads through the nervous system and moves to the brain. After the virus reaches the brain, the dog may experience one or more of the following phases:

*Prodromal phase:* This phase is characterized by a marked change in temperament. A gentle-natured dog may snap without reason, and a naturally aggressive dog may act quiet and affectionate. It is common for the dog to lick the site of the bite. This stage lasts 2-3 days and the dog may have fever spikes and erratic behavior.

*Furious phase:* In the furious phase, the dog becomes restless and irritable. The dog may be hypersensitive to auditory and visual stimuli. The dog may become vicious, disoriented, and have violent seizures. Death can occur.

*Paralytic phase:* This phase can follow either one of the first two stages. The animal

may salivate and breathe with difficulty. Facial muscles become paralyzed; the jaw drops, and respiratory failure and death usually follow.

Rabies may affect different animals differently. For instance a normally docile animal may become agitated, while a normally nervous, hyperactive animal may seem "tame".

### **WHY VACCINATE FOR RABIES?**

Vaccines play an essential role in ensuring your dog's health and vitality. Vaccines fortify the immune system against bacterial and viral invaders, making your dog better able to fight off infection and less likely to experience debilitating symptoms should he acquire the disease. When you introduce the killed or modified organisms in a vaccine into your dog, you stimulate an immune response, creating antibodies that protect him - for a period of time - against those organisms. His immune system eventually "remembers" this response by creating memory cells, and then employs these cells if the disease-causing organism enters his body. Memory cells resulting from vaccinations help your dog's body respond to diseases much faster and more broadly. The schedule for when rabies vaccines should be given varies by locality, so contact your veterinarian or Vetco for your particular situation.

### **WHERE CAN YOUR PET GET VACCINATED?**

If your pet is due for a rabies vaccination, an affordable, convenient solution is to go to a Vetco Clinic near you. At Vetco, with no appointment needed, and no exam fee, you can get a rabies vaccination and certificate for your pet at an affordable price. Vetco is available in over 30 states and has about 1,400 weekend and evening clinics at Petco stores across the nation. Find your nearest [Vetco](#) easily.

### **A FEW FACTS ON RABIES**

- Rabies affects mammals only, including humans.
- Globally, rabies is carried by dogs; regionally, rabies is carried by skunks, raccoons, foxes, coyotes, or bats and each variant affects each species differently.
- The different variants of rabies affect each mammal differently. Each variant is named for the species that it is typically found in. For example, the raccoon variant is usually found in raccoons, but other species, such as dogs, may become infected with that variant as well as other variants.
- Any close contact with a bat is cause for concern. The three situations to be especially aware of (and where there is an increased risk of a bite or scratch occurring) include:
  - Any physical contact with a bat
  - A bat in a room with an unattended child
  - A bat in your bedroom when you wake up
- There is no treatment for a dog that contracts the infection, and instances of unvaccinated dogs surviving rabies are extremely rare.

- If a dog is bitten or scratched by a wild animal, it is considered "exposed to rabies".
- If a non-vaccinated dog is exposed to rabies, euthanizing is the norm, although, in some cases, the dog may be placed in strict isolation for a number of months.
- The only way to achieve a definite diagnosis is to examine brain tissue.
- Each locality has different rabies rules regarding rabies exposure, treatment, and quarantine. Please speak to your veterinarian and local board of health for details.

## PLAY IT SAFE

Rabies is highly preventable if you follow the recommended vaccine schedules and keep your pet away from wild animals. The laws pertaining to rabies vaccinations and biting dogs vary region to region. Your veterinarian is able to guide and assist you in this matter, giving your pet the protection he needs and you peace of mind. The rabies vaccine is a "killed" rabies virus, so there is no chance your dog will contract rabies from the vaccine. It is an effective way to protect your dog from this deadly disease.