

RABIES FACT SHEET

Rabies is a fatal disease. By the time signs of the disease appear, it is too late to effectively treat it. Every person or animal is likely to die once symptoms develop. The treatment for prevention of rabies in humans after an animal bite or other exposure consists of a series of 5-6 injections over a 3-4 week period. This series is no more painful than any other vaccine injection.

The disease is caused by a virus which can infect dogs, cats, cattle, skunk, foxes, raccoons, bats and any warm-blooded animal. The rabies virus is transmitted in the saliva of the biting animal. About 50 percent of the animals and 15 percent of the humans bitten by a rabid animal develop the disease, if not treated immediately and depending on the infectivity of the biting animal and the site of the bites. Bites on the head or face have short incubation periods and are more likely to result in disease. Children are more vulnerable because of their size and because they are less able to protect themselves from bites.

Although cases of rabies in humans are rare, (27 deaths in 1990's, 20 were bat related) the disease is widespread in some wild animals. A number of rabid bats and skunks have been found in Marin County as well as occasional rabid foxes. A rabid domestic (feral) cat was found in 1991 which exposed several people, including animal control personnel. No rabid dogs have been diagnosed in Marin County for at least 10 years.

Vaccination of pet dogs and cats against rabies is the most important method of controlling rabies in pet animals. Dogs and cats are more likely to come into contact with a rabid skunk or bat in the outdoors, and prevention of rabies in our pets by keeping up their vaccination series will protect us as well.

Children should be taught not to touch stray or wild animals, alive or dead. If a dead or a live wild animal is observed on school grounds, the Humane Society or animal control for the county should be notified, particularly if the live animal is acting strangely.

Control: under a law passed by the California Legislature in 1957, LICENSING AND VACCINATION AGAINST RABIES ARE NOW COMPULSORY FOR ALL DOGS OVER FOUR MONTHS OF AGE IN RABIES ENDEMIC COUNTIES. **SINCE 1988, ALL 58 CALIFORNIA COUNTIES HAVE BEEN DECLARED RABIES ENDEMIC.** It is also strongly recommended that all domestic cats begin rabies vaccination series starting at age 3 months.

ALL animal bites should be reported to the local animal control agency. In Marin County this is the Marin Humane Society

For more information: contact your health care provider, School Nurse, the Marin County Health Department or: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/rabies/>