

You Can Help Stop a Killer

Sept. 28 marks the second annual World Rabies Day

BY CATHLEEN HANLON AND PETER COSTA

Rabies is a zoonotic viral disease that can be transmitted to animals and humans. The disease is transmitted mainly by bite, but exposure may also occur through contamination of broken skin or mucous membranes with saliva from an infected animal. Once neurological symptoms of the disease develop, rabies is fatal to both animals and humans.

The good news is that rabies is easily preventable. Vaccination prior to possible exposure is a crucial part of health management of domestic animals, and is the single most important factor in rabies prevention.

The United States has made considerable progress in the fight against rabies. The main threat of dog-to-dog transmission of rabies and related human exposure was eliminated in the 1950s and '60s through mandatory dog vaccination and stray control. However, rabies is still present in wildlife in the U.S., and presents a threat of infection to humans and domestic animals. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there were more than 7,000 cases of animal rabies reported in the United States in 2007—most of them occurring in wildlife such as raccoons, bats, and skunks.

In 2007, the CDC confirmed that canine rabies had disappeared from the U.S., but emphasized that dogs still need to be vaccinated, since exposure to infected wildlife is still possible. Domestic cats are still at risk—more than 300 cases of rabies in cats are reported every year, outnumbering canine cases three to one.

Globally, however, uncontrolled rabies in dogs still represents the largest

rabies threat. According to the World Health Organization, 10 million people a year are exposed to rabid dogs, and 55,000 people die due to that exposure.

Sept. 28 will mark the second annual World Rabies Day. Started last year by the nonprofit Alliance for Rabies Control, the goal of the day is to raise worldwide awareness of the control and prevention of rabies.

Hundreds of thousands of people—from health experts to ordinary citizens—will participate in awareness events to advocate for both human and animal populations. This “one medicine” approach is the core of the

Alliance’s message, stressing the importance of treating all the populations at risk. It’s the only global initiative of its kind, and is supported by numerous human and animal health agencies in the public, private, and NGO sectors worldwide.

As both national and global statistics indicate, rabies awareness and prevention is necessary no matter where you live. Animal care and control agencies and shelters are on the front lines of this battle, and can be instrumental in the disease’s continuing decline. Through the distribution of pamphlets, posters, and educational handouts, individuals and organizations can help the campaign and raise awareness about this terrible, yet easily preventable disease.

For more information and educational materials, visit the World Rabies Day website at worldrabiesday.org. AS

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The Ties That Bond

New booklet explores links between animal abuse and children’s well-being

Pets play a key role in the health of families and communities. In homes where they’re loved and respected, animals can help children develop such crucial traits as empathy and interpersonal skills. Conversely, an abused pet often indicates that a family is prone to other types of violence and neglect as well.

The connections between animal abuse and children’s welfare are explored in “A Common Bond: Maltreated Children and Animals in the Home,” a new booklet by Mary Lou Randour, who heads the Department of Human/Animal Relations: Education & Outreach for The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), and Howard Davidson, director of the American Bar Association (ABA) Center on Children and the Law. The guide is published by the American Humane Association in cooperation with The HSUS, the ABA, and Action for Child Protection.

The 45-page publication offers a framework for agencies associated with child protective services and animal welfare to identify issues and interact with each other. Citing numerous existing studies, the authors show service providers how to assess family situations and address problems. To acquire potentially useful information, Randour and Davidson write, “all personnel who work with children and their families must ask questions about animals.”

Some states mandate that animal control officers report suspected or known cases of child abuse or neglect. “A Common Bond” advocates for such “cross-reporting” practices, as well as collaborative training between humane and child welfare personnel, to be specified in law.

To obtain copies of “A Common Bond,” e-mail the American Humane Association at info@americanhumane.org. AS