2011 Veterinary Alert # 6

Stray Kitten Seen at a Manhattan Veterinary Hospital Tests Positive for Rabies

- On August 21, 2011 a stray kitten seen at a veterinary hospital in Manhattan tested positive for rabies. The kitten was found in a parking lot in Livingston, New Jersey.
- DOHMH encourages veterinarians to ensure that their clients' pets are up-to-date for rabies vaccination, and to educate pet owners regarding rabies prevention.
- Veterinarians should consider rabies in the differential diagnosis for any patient with a history of exposure to a potentially rabid wild or feral animal, and/or if presenting with progressive neurologic disease.
- To date this year, a total of 10 animals have tested positive for rabies, including the kitten mentioned in this alert.
  - For current information on rabies and animals testing positive for rabies in NYC visit www.nyc.gov/health/rabies

Please share with your colleagues in Veterinary Medicine and your staff

September 14, 2011

Dear Veterinary Colleagues,

On August 21st, 2011, the rabies laboratory at the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) Public Health Laboratory (PHL) reported a positive rabies test in a stray kitten that had been found in a church parking lot in Livingston, New Jersey (NJ). A series of three families cared for the four week old kitten over the course of two weeks, one of whom lived in Manhattan. In addition, two veterinary clinics evaluated the kitten; the first a NJ hospital which examined the kitten while it still appeared healthy, and a second in Manhattan during the time the kitten was exhibiting signs of rabies illness. Upon examination on Saturday August 20th, the kitten was recumbent, had tremors and was easily agitated. At that time it bit a veterinarian and expired shortly after. The DOHMH was immediately contacted and arrangements were made to have the kitten tested for rabies at PHL. Results available on Sunday were positive for rabies. Concurrent investigations by the NYC DOHMH and the NJ Department of Health identified eight persons who had been bitten or otherwise exposed to the kitten and for whom rabies postexposure prophylaxis was recommended.

Rabies is most commonly spread to domestic animals by attacks from wild animals. To date in 2011, 10 animals (7 raccoons and 1 bat from the Bronx; 1 raccoon and 1 kitten from Manhattan) tested positive for rabies at the NYC DOHMH PHL Rabies Laboratory. It is important to note that while the kitten was reported from Manhattan, it was originally found in Livingston, New Jersey before being brought to Manhattan. Since 1992 when raccoon rabies first appeared in NYC, there have been 13 cats that have tested positive for rabies; 11 were strays. There has not been a rabid dog reported in NYC in over 50 years.
This is a reminder to consider rabies as part of the differential diagnosis for any animal presenting with a progressive neurological illness, particularly if the animal is a stray or if there is a history in which the animal was exposed to a potentially rabid wild or feral animal (especially raccoons, skunks and bats).

**Rabies Vaccination for Dogs and Cats**
Maintaining vaccination against rabies is required for all dogs and cats in New York City. Any unvaccinated dog or cat that may have been exposed to a rabid animal is required to enter into six-month isolation in an approved facility or be euthanized. If a pet is up-to-date with its rabies vaccine but potentially exposed to a rabid animal, a booster vaccine should be given immediately, and the owner should be instructed to confine and observe the animal for 45 days in the owner’s home.

Any healthy pet dog or cat that has bitten or scratched a person is required to be confined and observed by the owner (in most instances) for 10 days. If the animal is not currently vaccinated against rabies, vaccination should not occur until after the completion of the 10 day observation period. Animal bites are reportable to the DOHMH Veterinary Public Health Services (VPHS) Animal Bite Unit at 212-676-2483.

**Primary or Preexposure Vaccination for Humans**
Preexposure vaccination should be considered for veterinarians and any staff whose activities bring them into frequent contact with rabies virus or potentially rabid bats, raccoons, skunks, cats, dogs, or other species at risk for having rabies. Preexposure prophylaxis is administered for several reasons. It:
- Simplifies postexposure prophylaxis by eliminating the need for rabies immune globulin (RIG) and decreasing the number of doses of vaccine needed,
- Provides possible protection when post-exposure therapy is delayed, and
- Provides possible protection for exposure to rabies, such as a scratch or a bite that goes unrecognized or unreported.

The DOHMH does not offer rabies vaccine, for either preexposure or postexposure vaccination. Persons interested in obtaining pre-exposure vaccination should contact their physician or a travel vaccination clinic.

Veterinarians and their staff who work directly with animals where animal rabies is enzootic, such as New York City, are considered to have frequent risk for exposure to rabies and should have a serum sample tested for rabies antibody every 2 years using the rapid fluorescent focus inhibition test (RFFIT). If the titer is less than complete neutralization at a 1:5 serum dilution by RFFIT, the person should receive a single booster dose of vaccine. Rabies titer testing by RFFIT is available through several commercial laboratories and Kansas State University.

Persons who are immunosuppressed may not mount an adequate immune response so should avoid activities for which rabies pre-exposure prophylaxis is indicated. When this is not possible, they should seek advice on how to approach obtaining rabies pre-exposure vaccination from their health care provider or contact the DOHMH Bureau of Communicable Disease for more information, see contact information below.

For questions about whether persons should receive rabies PEP, contact a health care provider or the DOHMH Bureau of Communicable Disease (BCD) at 347-396-2600 during business hours (outside of business hours, please call the Poison Control Center at 212-POISONS or 212-764-7667). For questions pertaining to rabies preexposure vaccination and titer testing, contact the DOHMH Bureau of Communicable Disease (BCD) at 347-396-2600 during business hours.

**Additional Information**

**What All Veterinarians Can Do**

- Educate clients to:
  - Avoid contact with wild animals and stray animals.
  - Make sure their dog or cat is up-to-date on its rabies vaccinations.
  - Avoid leaving their pets outdoors unattended and feed them indoors.
  - Avoid trying to separate animals that are fighting.
  - Contact their veterinarian if their pet has been in contact with an animal that might be rabid.

- Report all suspected animal rabies cases to the DOHMH VPHS 212-676-2120/2483.

- Contact us for more information:
  - Veterinary Public Health Services 212-676-2120
  - Bureau of Communicable Disease 347-396-2600
  - After Hours: NYC Poison Control Center 212-764-7667

As always, we greatly appreciate your partnership and cooperation.

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