



WINN FELINE FOUNDATION

For the Health and Well-being of All Cats

637 Wyckoff Ave., Suite 336, Wyckoff, NJ 07481 • www.winnfelinefoundation.org
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Rabies in Cats

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Rabies is a viral disease found worldwide in all mammals. This disease affects the brain and causes changes in behaviour, severe neurologic signs, followed by seizures, coma, and eventually death. This disease is fatal in almost all cases, only a very small number of humans have ever survived infection, even with intensive treatment. Treatment in animals is rarely attempted due to the severe risk of disease to humans. While several strains of rabies exist that prefer to infect different species, all strains are untreatable and inevitably fatal.

Rabies is spread through contact with bodily fluids of infected animals, including blood and saliva. The most common mode of transmission is through bite wounds; however any contact with a rabid animal carries a risk of infection.

Worldwide, rabies is found in several species of wild animals including foxes skunks, raccoons, and most commonly bats. In recent years, widespread vaccination of wildlife has greatly reduced the incidence in skunks and raccoons, however bats remain a significant threat. In North America, vaccine baits are commonly air dropped and seeded in rural, semi-rural, and even urban areas (depending on the jurisdiction). These oral baits are eaten by wildlife and provide protection against rabies. While these oral vaccines are not as effective as the injectable forms used by veterinarians, they have succeeded at significantly reducing the incidence of wildlife rabies. Some areas (such as much of the United Kingdom) have largely succeeded in eliminating rabies in wildlife populations.

Rabies is capable of infecting all species of domestic mammal, including cats, dogs, horses, and cows. Current government regulation in many jurisdictions where rabies is endemic requires all cats and dogs to be protected from rabies through regular vaccination. These regulations depend on the area where a cat lives. Several types of vaccine exist against rabies, which require boosters every 1 to 3 years. Traditionally, non-adjuvanted vaccines have been considered a safer option than traditionally killed-adjuvanted varieties, however recent modifications to vaccines and new studies show this may be less true than in the past.

Animals up to date on vaccinations have a very, very low risk of infection; even if they are exposed to affected animals their risk of disease is small. Animals who are currently vaccinated and exposed to rabies may be subjected to quarantines and examinations after immediate revaccination, but are rarely euthanized. It is recommended that unvaccinated animals exposed to rabies virus be euthanized. If owners are unwilling to have this done, the exposed animal will be placed in strict isolation for a minimum of 6 months.

The largest rabies threat to our feline population comes from contact with bats. Outdoor cats may come in contact with rabies through bats, foxes, raccoons, or skunks. Bats commonly find their way into houses where they are caught, eaten, and played with by pet cats. Cats may be infected through biting or eating bats, or by being bitten by them. The small tooth size of most bats means that bite wounds are often missed

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Member Combined Federal Campaign #10321



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or overlooked by owners and veterinarians. Each year, many bats test positive for rabies, and many more are likely present in the wild.

Cats infected with rabies may not show any signs for weeks, months, or even years after exposure. Once clinical signs develop, the disease is rapidly fatal. Cats may infect people or other animals for up to 10 days before showing signs. Keeping your cat (indoor or outdoor) up to date on rabies prevention is essential for their health and wellbeing.

See Also

Cornell Feline Health Center

http://www.vet.cornell.edu/fhc/Health_Information/rabies.cfm

References

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