PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Animal Bites Should be Taken Seriously

Rabies is a preventable viral disease that is transmitted through the bite of a rabid animal. Santa Barbara County does have rabid animals, thus consultation with a physician following a bite from an animal is strongly recommended. Although transmission to humans is rare, it is fatal if not treated.

The vast majority of rabies cases occur in wild animals like bats and skunks. Many wild animals are not tested so the prevalence is unclear. In Santa Barbara County, we identified 3 rabid wild animals in 2010, 19 rabid wild animals in 2009, and 4 rabid wild animals in 2008. Bats and skunks do have contact with domestic animals such as cats and dogs, therefore consultation with medical professionals is recommended when an animal bite or attack of a human occurs with any animal. Note that because of the high incidence of rabies in bats, human contact without a bite may warrant the need for post-exposure vaccination.

If it is determined that post-exposure treatment is warranted, the treatment for rabies in humans consists of doses of vaccine over a 14-day period of time. Current vaccines are relatively painless and are given in the arm, like a flu or tetanus vaccine.

Human rabies prevention and control remains a concern. Rabies is more prevalent in other countries including both domestic animals like dogs and wild animals like monkeys, so travelers should be extra cautious to avoid bites. A “Rabies in Americas” meeting including researchers, health professionals, international and national and local managers of rabies programs, wildlife biologists and laboratory personnel is held annually. The meeting this year is scheduled for October 22 in Puerto Rico.

For more information about rabies, see: www.cdc.gov/rabies/

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