Rabies in California

SANTA BARBARA, CA – The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) issued the 2015 state report on rabies noting an increase in rabies over 2014 and an increase over the annual average of rabies cases in the previous ten years (2005 – 2014). One of the 2015 rabies cases was in a bat from Santa Barbara County. Last week, another bat from Santa Barbara County tested positive for rabies.

Rabies is a virus that severely affects the central nervous system. In the United States, rabies is chiefly a disease of wild mammals, but it can occasionally affect humans. Animals with rabies shed the virus in their saliva. If saliva from an infected animal gets onto a break in a person’s skin—most commonly through a bite—or through the eyes, mouth, or nose, that person might become infected. Rabies vaccine, administered after a possible exposure, is highly effective at preventing the progression to rabies disease. However, once an infected person develops symptoms of rabies there is no effective treatment and the infected person will die. Animal bites are required to be immediately reported to County and City Animal Control. Timely reporting of animal bites allows Public Health experts to offer recommendations on the need for rabies vaccination.

Statewide, rabies was confirmed in 230 animals last year across 40 different counties in California, including Santa Barbara County 99 percent of these confirmed rabies cases were in wild animals. Bats (198, 86.8%) were the wild animal most frequently reported rabid, followed by skunks (29, 12.7%). Rabies is also occasionally detected in other wild animals such as raccoons and foxes. Rabies is rarely identified in domestic animals such as dogs and cats, but can occur if they come into close contact with the saliva of a rabid wild animal.

It is important to protect your pets from rabies. Do not allow pets to have contact with wild or unfamiliar animals, especially bats and skunks. Keep them confined on your property or under control when off your property. See your veterinarian regularly to ensure that your pet remains in good health and is up-to-date on its rabies vaccination. All dogs in California are required to be vaccinated against rabies.

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