

5 Must-Know Issues Regarding Rabies

September 28 is World Rabies Day—a global health observance to raise awareness about this deadly but preventable disease. In the U.S., rabies is most commonly transmitted to pets by wild animals such as bats, raccoons, skunks, foxes, and in other countries, the virus is commonly transmitted from dogs to humans. Richard Ford, DVM, MS, ACVIM, ACVPM (Hon), discusses 5 must-know issues regarding rabies. To learn more, scan the QR code below and listen to the full Vet2Vet conversation between Dr. Ford and Cassi Fleming, MS, DVM sponsored by Boehringer Ingelheim Animal Health.

1. Rabies is the world's deadliest infectious disease

Rabies causes nearly 60 000 human deaths every year, most often in underdeveloped countries in Africa, Asia (particularly India), and South America. Approximately 50% of the fatalities occur in children younger than 15 years of age, and from a global perspective, 99% of rabies-related human deaths are associated with dog bites.

2. Rabies vaccination programs significantly decreased incidence in the U.S.

In the late 1950s, U.S. programs to encourage canine rabies vaccination led to a dramatic decrease in rabies cases in domestic animals and people. In the 1950s, an average of 11 people died of rabies every year. Currently, an average of 2 people die of rabies each year, and in these cases, the virus is not transmitted by pets.

3. Cat rabies cases far outnumber dog cases in the U.S.

Every year, about 400 domestic animal rabies cases are confirmed in the U.S. Of these, nearly 300 involve cats, which typically outnumber dog cases by a factor of 4. Increasing rabies vaccination rates in the feline population could potentially minimize disease spread, and veterinarians can help by educating their cat

clients about the importance of rabies vaccination.

4. The U.S. has no national rabies law

Rabies laws and regulations are established at the state level in most cases and, in some jurisdictions, at the city or county level. This means that a veterinarian must know the laws in their area to ensure they fulfill the correct requirements regarding vaccination and protocols for an exposed animal.

5. Veterinarians can access rabiesaware.org for guidance

While the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians publishes an updated rabies compendium every few years, not all states or jurisdictions implement this law, and the compendium doesn't replace state law. Veterinarians can go to rabiesaware.org to seek clarification about the rabies laws mandated by their state.



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