Rabies Case in Fresno County

On October 9, 2019, the Fresno County Department of Public Health (FCDPH) received a report of a positive case of rabies in a domestic cat that bit a Fresno County resident. This is a reminder for residents, that Fresno County is identified by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) as a rabies endemic area in the state. Rabies is a very serious disease and is almost always fatal if not treated before symptoms appear.

According to historical data, this is the first confirmed case of feline rabies in Fresno County since 1943.

Rabies remains a concern among wild mammals in Fresno County, especially among bats and skunks. While any mammal can be infected with the rabies virus, bats are the most common mammal in Fresno County that carry rabies. In 2018 and 2019, six (6) bats tested positive for rabies in Fresno County.

Rabies is a disease caused by a virus and is found in carnivores with sporadic spillover infection to domestic animals such as in this case. The disease is transmitted when another animal or human comes into contact with an infected animal through its saliva, either through a bite, an open cut in the skin, or mucous membrane exposure for example mouth, nose or eyes. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) the rabies virus infects the central nervous system of humans and animals. If a person does not receive the appropriate medical care after a potential rabies exposure, the virus can cause disease in the brain, ultimately resulting in death.

Signs of rabies in wild animals:
- Acting unusually tame or unafraid of approaching people
- Nocturnal animals that are active during the day such as skunks and bats
- Bats that are unable to fly or have been caught by a domestic pet

Signs of rabies in a domestic pet:
- Trouble walking, drinking or eating
- A change in behavior, such as aggression
- Difficulty breathing and excessive salivation
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Signs and symptoms of rabies in humans may appear a few days to more than a year after the bite happens, at first the symptoms start with tingling, prickling, or an itching feeling around the bite area. A person may also have flu like symptoms such as fever, headache and weakness. After a few days of those symptoms, neurological symptoms may develop that include:

- Anxiety, confusion, and agitation
- Abnormal behavior
- Hallucinations
- Hydrophobia (fear of water)
- Insomnia
- Muscle spasms in the throat that makes it difficult to swallow

If you are bit or scratched by a wild animal or your pet;
- Immediately wash the wound with soap and water
- Call your medical provider
- Be prepared to provide detailed information about the date, time and location of the bite, a description of the animal and what you were doing at the time of the bite

If your pet is bitten by a wild animal:
- Do not attempt to intervene or capture the wild animal
- Report the bite to your local animal control agency as soon as possible

Rabies infection in humans can be prevented after a bite from a rabid animal through a series of vaccines. It is crucial that the person bitten by a rabid animal report the incident to their health care provider and begin treatment as soon as possible.

To prevent rabies in our community, pet owners are required by state law to vaccinate their dogs against rabies at the age of 4 months. Although not mandated, it is highly recommended to have your cat vaccinated for rabies.

Other preventive measures include:
- Do not approach, handle, or feed wild and unfamiliar animals
- Seal any holes or gaps in your home where bats and other animals can enter
- Do not leave out pet food that attracts wild animals
- Keep your pets under adult supervision when off your property

To report a bite on your pet, please call Fresno County Animal Control at (559) 600-PETS (7387). If you or a family member has been bit by your pet or a wild animal call your Health Care Provider immediately. For more information on rabies call (559) 600-3332 or visit www.fcdph.org/PETS.

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