



PRESS RELEASE FOR LOCAL MEDIA

Central Michigan District Health Department
"Promoting Healthy Families, Healthy Communities"

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To: Local Media

From: Alison Fegan, CMDHD Health Educator

RE: Responsible Pet Ownership / Rabies

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Responsible Pet Ownership and Awareness

So you've just brought home a new little puppy, ferret, or kitten, feeling confident your new best friend is quite healthy after its initial round of vet-administered pet vaccines. But just as you wouldn't expect your childhood vaccinations to last forever, neither will your pets. The key to a healthy, long life for your dog, cat or ferret is responsible pet ownership, awareness, and a yearly round of preventative pet vaccines.

The types of vaccines that dogs, cats and ferrets receive are for a variety of different diseases; of course, some viruses are shared between the species, such as rabies. Preventing these diseases with annual pet vaccines and an ounce of responsible pet ownership is much cheaper than any treatment would cost to make your pet healthy again. Normally, the initial rabies vaccination occurs when the pet is four months or older, and the others follow when the dog or cat is at least 6 months old.

State law requires that dogs and ferrets be vaccinated against rabies by a licensed veterinarian. It is also important to make sure cats, even those kept strictly indoors, are vaccinated against rabies.

Rabies is a preventable viral disease of mammals most often transmitted through the bite of a rabid animal. The vast majority of rabies cases reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) each year occur in wild animals like raccoons, skunks, bats, and foxes.

Rabies virus is present in the saliva and brain tissue of an infected animal. People can be exposed to rabies when they are bitten by a rabid animal. Other possible routes for exposure include getting infectious material in the eyes, nose, or mouth, or on fresh cuts in the skin. Making sure pets are vaccinated and avoiding contact with stray or wild animals can reduce your risk to this potentially fatal disease.

Common sources of rabies are typically wild mammals like bats, skunks, raccoons, and foxes. While bats throughout Michigan have the potential to carry rabies and spread it to pets and other animals, skunks have historically only been found to be a source of rabies in the “thumb” area of Michigan extending down to southeast Michigan. This appears to be changing as cases of rabies associated with rabid skunks have been identified in mid-Michigan.

According to the 2012 Rabies Positive Michigan produced by the DNR, during 2012, a total of 61 animals tested positive for rabies in Michigan. Cases include 52 bats, 8 skunks and 1 fox. It’s important to remind people that rabies is out there, and they need to vaccinate their animals – including horses and other livestock, and avoid contact with wild animals.

Remember that above all, your pets are relying on you to keep them healthy, and practicing responsible pet ownership is ultimately up to you!

For more information on rabies, please visit www.michigan.gov/rabies

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