



**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**

**Release Date: May 2014**

**Be a Responsible Pet Owner – Get Your Pet Vaccinated**

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 old 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. However, bats are the animal most frequently testing positive for rabies in Michigan.

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. Any animal bite represents a potential exposure to rabies and as such, animal bites must be reported to the public health authorities. Public health authorities are then tasked with evaluating the bite for rabies risk, coordinating testing or observation of an animal, and recommending post-exposure treatment.

Making sure pets are vaccinated and avoiding contact with stray or wild animals can reduce your risk to this potentially fatal disease. During 2013, a total of 41 bats tested positive for rabies in Michigan. 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.

Being a responsible pet owner is much more than providing water, food and shelter for your pet. 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](http://www.michigan.gov/rabies).

This article has been brought to you by Central Michigan District Health Department, which serves the counties of Arenac, Clare, Gladwin, Isabella, Osceola and Roscommon. Visit our website at [www.cmdhd.org](http://www.cmdhd.org) and LIKE Central Michigan District Health Department on Facebook.

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