

# ANIMAL HOSPITAL OF LANESVILLE

1849 Highway 11 Lanesville, IN 47136 (812) 952-3643

## **Rabies in Indiana**

By Dr. Rene Wingerter

A recent study in the state of Indiana showed that of all animals testing positive for rabies, the largest proportion (67%) were skunks. This is why we strongly recommend that you never approach a wild skunk, even if it appears healthy or is just a baby. The risk to human life is just too great.

The species with the next highest Rabies infection rate were bats which account for 24% of rabies cases. All other wild animals put together (including fox, raccoons, and groundhogs) accounted for only 1.1% of animal rabies cases. An epidemic of raccoon rabies is in Ohio and is expected to hit Indiana soon.

Dogs and cats accounted for almost 8% of the rabies cases in Indiana. The infection rate in cats is higher than in dogs and is growing at around 50% per year.

If you are bitten by an animal, you should immediately wash all wounds with soap and water. Thorough cleaning is perhaps the most effective way to prevent rabies infection, plus control bacterial infection as well. You should then consult your physician about tetanus injections, antibiotic therapy and possible rabies vaccinations. You should also contact the Health Department for your county to report the incident.

If you were bitten by an animal that has a high incidence of rabies (skunk, raccoon and bat) you should strongly consider Rabies shots. Bites from squirrels, hamsters, guinea pigs, chipmunks, gerbils, rats, mice, rabbits and other herbivores should still be vigorously cleaned, and your physician consulted about tetanus shots and possible antibiotic therapy, but rabies vaccinations are almost never called for. If you were bitten by a dog or cat that has not received rabies vaccinations within the past year, it is best to consult your physician and the Health Department and quarantine the animal for 10 days to watch for signs of illness. If the animal becomes ill, it should be taken to the veterinarian and euthanized so it can be tested for rabies.

If your pet is bitten by a wild animal and is current on rabies vaccinations, he should still receive another booster as soon as possible. If he is not current on vaccinations, you will need to confine and observe him for at least 6 months before you can be sure he is not infected. As long as he has not bitten any person, you can still give him his rabies shots as soon as possible. If he has bitten someone, he will need strict quarantine for 10 days before any vaccinations can be given.

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The best method of rabies control is through vaccinations of dogs and cats and avoidance of all wild animals. Our pets should act as a barrier to protect us from exposure to rabies from wild animals. But if your pets are not vaccinated, they instead act as a bridge. When your unvaccinated barn cat bites you, it is like every wild animal it has come in contact with over the past year has also bitten you.

As of July 1, 1995, both dogs and cats are legally required to have Rabies vaccinations yearly. Anyone harboring an unvaccinated dog or cat can be fined up to \$25,000 and is charged with a felony. Harboring means the animal has been staying on your property for more than three days.

For more information, please call the Animal Hospital of Lanesville at 952-3643. 🐾