

# Dangerous Rabies Rampant In Foxes on Arctic North Slope

Dr. Donald K. Freedman, Director, Division of Public Health, has summarized in the following article information concerning presence of rabies in warm blooded animals on the Arctic Slopes.

This information is of particular significance to oil developers on the North Slope.

Rabies is frequently found among foxes in northern and western Alaska and presents a continuous threat to sled dogs and humans in those areas. Rabies is a disease of the nervous system and can affect all warm blooded animals.

It is transmitted in the saliva of a diseased animal that bites its victims. Rabies may show itself either as apparent insanity (known as "furious rabies") from whence the term "mad dog" originated, or by paralysis known as "dumb rabies." Both forms end in paralysis and death.

In the furious form the first symptom is usually restlessness; a friendly dog, fox or wolf may become vicious, or a vicious one friendly. The animal's voice usually becomes hoarse, and froth may appear at the mouth.

A dog with furious rabies becomes aggressive, roams aimlessly, and bites at any moving object. If confined, it may chew wood or bars until its teeth break.

In dumb rabies, after a stage of restlessness, the dog may become quite calm, it does not tend to roam, the muscles of its lower jaw become paralyzed, and its mouth hangs open several inches and will not stay closed.

The animal may act as though it has a bone in its throat. (It should be noted that a dog with an obstruction in its throat will attempt to remove it, whereas a paralyzed throat will not make such an effort.)

In either the furious or dumb form the throat muscles become paralyzed, the animal cannot drink, paralysis sets in, and the dog dies within a week. It is principally during the "roaming stage of furious rabies" that foxes transmit the disease to dogs or humans.

They have been known to enter villages and camps, attack men on the trail, and to bite dogs at work. The period between the bite and the first symptoms may vary from 14 to 285 days.

While only about 15% of people bitten by rabid animals acquire the disease, anyone so bitten should immediately report to a doctor for treatment, for an untreated case results in almost certain death.

The percentage of dogs that gets rabies after being bitten is much higher, and the safest course is to kill the animal.

All animals who have bitten persons or who are suspected of being rabid should be closely confined and given no chance to bite for at least two weeks during which time paralysis will set in if the animal is infected.

## SUBMITTING SAMPLES

Undamaged dog heads may be sent to the United States Public Health Service, Arctic Health Research Center, College, Alaska, 99701, phone 479-2211.

In order to protect the numerous people working for transportation companies coming in contact with the parcel, the animal's head should be placed in a metal container with a tight fitting lid, or preferably sealed.

Enough absorbent material

should be placed inside the container to absorb blood or other body fluids. The container should be well wrapped, and labeled to read "Rabies Material - Handle with Care."

If the brain material is damaged either through head blow or destroyed by shotgun or rifle, it makes examinations very difficult.

The best control is prevention; and the villages and oil exploration camps on the North Slope would do well to consider vaccination of their dogs.

The Alaska Department of Agriculture maintains a stock of vaccines which are available at cost (approximately 50 cents

(Continued on Page 8)

# **RABIES . . .**

(continued from page 3)

per dog) in areas where dogs are economically important, and veterinary service is not available.

It is required that some qualified individual be in charge, for handling vaccines requires certain precautions.

In communities where rabies is a threat, and the individuals are unable to afford protection the Department may be able to assist.

## **SUGGESTED PROGRAM FOR ISOLATED COMMUNITIES & CAMPS**

1. confine all dogs and eliminate strays.
2. Vaccinate all animals. Immunity lasts up to three years, depending on the type of vaccine.
3. Eliminate foxes and wolves in the area where rabies has been found.
4. Confine for observation biting dogs or those showing any rabies symptoms.
5. Submit heads, of those animals who show definite symptoms, for positive identification.
6. Use caution in skinning or handling suspect animals to prevent accidental exposure.
7. Seek medical aid immediately when bitten if the animal shows symptoms.