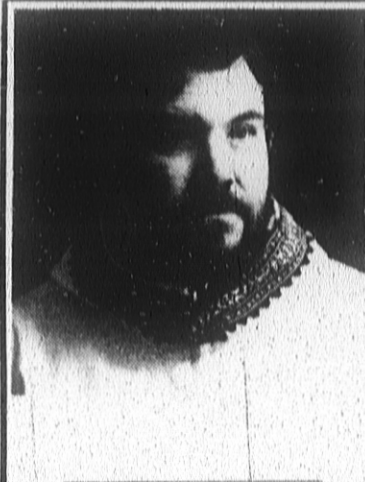


Fight rabies: vaccinate your dogs



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Do you remember the fox with rabies that got into a fight with some dogs in Mountain Village back in 1978? After that happened, they had to go out and kill 250

dogs there that might have come in contact with rabies.

Just last week a three year old girl was mauled by a pack of 15 dogs running loose. Since 1955, 28 Alaskan children have been killed by uncontrolled dogs. In fact, this has killed more children here than any other disease!

You have heard about rabies but do you really know what it is? Rabies is a virus that is usually spread through a bite of an animal. The rabies virus is in the saliva of the animal that gets into another animal or person usually through a bite. Humans can get rabies too but it is very rare in the United States: last year there were only two cases of human rabies. Of the million Americans that were bitten last year, 35,000 had to have rabies vaccinations.

Unfortunately, rabies is almost

always fatal. The shots are expensive and are painful. Usually the animal is captured and tested to see if it is rabid. In states like Alaska where the health department keeps close watch on rabies cases, there were 17 cases confirmed in 1984 and 19 in 1983. The cases were found in the Northern and Southcentral areas with none reported in Southeast.

There are about 135 cases in the rest of the U.S., a number that has really gone down since 1947 when there were 8000 cases of rabies a year! Deaths have gone down from 40 a year in the past to a low one or two a year now. A 95% decrease in human deaths is a great improvement.

What does rabies do that can kill a person? The rabies virus travels to the brain through the nerve endings located in the skin

and comes in through the bite. First it stays in the bite area then takes off using the nerves as a "roadway to the brain." A bit later, it shows up in the nerves closer to the head and finally, makes its way into the brain.

The symptoms of rabies start showing up one to two months after the bite. If the bite is far from the brain (like in the foot), then it will take longer for it to get to the head and so the symptoms will not show up as quickly.

First a person complains of being tired, headaches and being generally in a bad mood. Then a sore throat appears followed by a choking feeling everytime the person tries to drink something. The person becomes so afraid to drink anything that he eventually goes into a coma and dies.

What can you do if you are bit-

ten by an animal with rabies? It depends how you were bitten. Was it someone's pet or was it a wild animal? Wild animals are usually the carriers of the virus. The time to start the anti-rabies shots is immediately after a suspicious bite. Wash the wound with something that will kill the virus like alcohol or soap and water. The wound should be left open instead of being sewed or closed.

Next the person should get rabies immune globulin and a vaccine which will give you the protection you need to knock out the virus before they get into your nerves and brain.

In deciding if a person should get the treatment or not, The Harvard Medical School doctors recommend: 1) examine the species of the biting animal. Skunks, racoons, foxes and bats are more dangerous than squirrels; 2) are there rabies in the region?; 3) why was the person bitten? An animal that bites without provocation is more probable to have rabies. 4) type of exposure. A bite is more serious than being licked or drooled on; and 5) the condition of the animal. A recently vaccinated animal is less dangerous than a sick one.

The Alaska State Epidemiology office recommends that every dog be vaccinated against rabies and that you chain up your dogs. Remember that dogs get provoked easily if teased, if handled during feeding and if they are tied up all the time and not used to being handled by other people than their owners.

Dogs should never be allowed to run in packs or roam around on their own. As residents of Alaska villages and cities, we must keep in mind our responsibilities to our neighbors. Good neighbors are good citizens we were taught in school. And good citizenship starts right in our own back yard.