

January 25, 2008

Rabies Investigation

Background

In early November 2007, a litter of puppies was born on a farm in Perth County. The puppies' mother encountered a skunk and died in mid-December. It is likely that the mother dog contracted rabies from the skunk and passed it on to the pups. Several of the pups from this litter died on the farm. On January 3, the remaining puppies were picked up by "Feed Me More Pets" of Chesley, Ontario, a business that sells puppies at Dr. Flea's Flea Market in Toronto at a booth identified as "Puppies R Us."

The four puppies may have come into contact with several other pups owned by this business.

On January 13, 2008, a family residing in Peel Region visited the flea market and purchased a puppy from this vendor. The next day, the puppy became ill and was taken to the Toronto Humane Society (THS). The puppy bit a THS supervisor. The puppy died and later tested positive for rabies.

Toronto Public Health's (TPH) investigation has revealed that the vendor was selling puppies at Dr. Flea's Flea Market on the weekends of January 5-6, 12-13, and 19-20. The market is located in Toronto at Highway 27 and Albion Road.

Questions & Answers

What should I do if I purchased or touched the puppies at this flea market?

Anyone who touched or purchased puppies at Booth # 1513 at Dr. Flea's Flea Market since January 5, or purchased a dog from 'Feed Me More Pets' of Chesley, Ontario, since January 3 should call their local public health unit as soon as possible.

Toronto residents should call 416-338-7600. Staff will be available on Friday, Saturday and Sunday Jan. 25, 26 and 27 from 8:30 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. Health unit staff will assess the risk of exposure to rabies. If vaccination is required, it must be taken as soon as possible.

What is rabies?

Rabies is caused by a virus that affects the central nervous system (brain and spinal cord) of warm-blooded mammals, including humans. Once symptoms of rabies appear, it is almost always fatal.

How do people get rabies?

People are usually exposed to rabies from the bite of a rabid animal. An animal with rabies may carry the virus for up to ten days without showing any symptoms of illness. In rare cases, people

are exposed to rabies by non-bite exposure. All bites, regardless of location, represent a potential risk of rabies transmission.

What is a non-bite exposure?

Scratches, abrasions, open wounds, or mucous membranes (i.e., eyes, nose, mouth) that become contaminated with virus-containing saliva or other potentially infectious material from a rabid animal constitute non-bite exposures. Non-bite exposures from animals rarely cause rabies.

Can I catch rabies from someone who has been exposed to a rabid dog?

Exposure to the rabies virus from a dog does not mean that a person poses a risk to other people. The only cases of rabies caused by human-to-human transmission have occurred among recipients of transplanted organs. Almost all cases of rabies are passed to humans from infected animals. It is important to get the vaccine if you have been bitten by an animal infected with rabies to prevent getting sick.

What medical attention do I need if I am exposed to rabies?

If you are bitten by an animal or if infectious material (such as saliva) from an animal gets into your eyes, nose, mouth, or a wound, then you should wash the area with soap and water immediately. Washing immediately can greatly reduce the chances for infection. Contact your doctor or your local health department immediately as they can help determine your risk of exposure to rabies. Rabies vaccinations will be administered promptly if the risk of exposure to the virus is high.

How many cases of human rabies have been reported in Canada?

Human rabies cases are very rare in Canada. For the most recent information on the number of rabies cases in Canada, visit the Notifiable Disease On-Line section on the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) Web site.

Can I donate blood if I have been exposed to rabies?

If you are exposed to rabies and your physician recommends vaccination, Canadian Blood Services advises that you do not donate blood until 52 weeks after the treatment.

Should I stay home from work/school if I have been exposed to a rabid animal?

No. If you are not feeling ill and you are receiving appropriate vaccine for rabies you are not a risk to others.

If I have been exposed to rabies and I am pregnant, should I get the vaccine?

Yes. If you have been exposed to a rabid animal and you are pregnant, you should get vaccinated. The vaccine does not contain live virus and is safe for use in pregnancy.

Is the vaccine safe?

As with all vaccines, there are some side effects, but they are not common with rabies vaccine. Talk to your health care provider about side effects.

This fact sheet was prepared using information from the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.