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From: lissa [lissa@lissa.net]
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To: 'MAGDRL'
Subject: DOE Topic #29: Canine Rabies

Hi All,

Thought I'd share some interesting information I learned at one of my Agency's information sessions yesterday. I work for USDA/Animal and Plant Health Information Service (APHIS) which is the federal Agency that, among other things, sets guidelines for health assessments and inspection of animal breeding and holding facilities. My Agency is made up of mostly veterinarians and veterinary researchers who set federal guidelines for all things animal-related. We're the ones who are doing Avian Influenza preparedness, and our employees constantly receive information on diseases that are transmissible from animals to humans.

Yesterday we had a seminar presented by Dr. Katherine Feldman, DVM, MPH who works for USDA at the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, and for the MD/VA College of Veterinary Medicine (she is on the forefront of Avian Influenza research.) The topic for this presentation was "Living Healthy with Pets" and I'm sharing one topic in her presentation as Dog Owner Education Topic #29.

Dr. Feldman talked about "zoonoses" (animal diseases that are transmissible to humans), and I'm sharing a few 'ahah' moments related to rabies.

- Across the US, bats are the most frequent carriers of rabies. On the east coast, besides bats the major carrier is raccoons. On the west coast, the second most common carrier is foxes.
- Through blood tests, vets can tell which animal transmitted rabies because each strain is adapted to their host. In other words, a dog may contract raccoon rabies and bite a human thereby "spilling" raccoon rabies from the host, to a human across animal species. Clinical analysis can tell what the originating species of the rabies was.
- Canine rabies is survivable for a dog depending on its age and health -- and the location of a bite. A healthy adult dog bitten on the lower leg is much more likely to survive rabies than the same dog bitten in the neck.
- The reason that most Animal Control groups hold a dog for a 10 day quarantine is because dogs only shed the virus for 10 days. Within that time, if they bite another animal they can transmit the disease, otherwise it's not easily contagious.
- However.... it's worth noting that the incubation period may vary widely from a few days to 19 years. In 75% of cases, rabies onset occurs within 90 days of exposure.
- With dog bites, the major transmission vehicle is saliva so if the dog does not break the skin, the possibility of transmission is slim. Dr. Feldman's best advice if the skin is broken is to immediately wash the area thoroughly with soap and water, quarantine the dog, and seek medical attention.
- The only definitive diagnosis of canine rabies is post-mortem analysis of the animal's brain tissue. Hence, most Animal Control authorities require euthanasia to determine whether the dog has rabies. However human rabies can be verified pre-mortem.
- The good news is, **canine rabies has been virtually eradicated in the US** due to state dog vaccination regulations. That's not a reason to withhold rabies vaccination, but you may want to consider having titer screens done to determine whether your dog still has immunity or if it needs a booster.

The most current statistics show only 3 reported human rabies fatalities in American in 2002. In the USA, 93% of cases of rabies are found in wildlife. Dr. Feldman stressed that if you're exposed to bats (even if you think you weren't bitten), try to capture the bat instead of our normal human inclination to try to get it out of our home or tent. This allows the bat to be tested--- and it could save you from having to go through the series of inoculations! And pets that are inoculated but are exposed to rabies should only receive a booster if they begin to show symptoms such as erratic behavior, paralysis, or hydrophobia (yeah, and it doesn't count for most Danes who have hydrophobia in regards to rain!)

However if you travel overseas, particularly if you travel to South America, Africa, and Asia (especially India), canine rabies is rampant in those areas. CDC recommends that humans get prophylactic rabies vaccinations with a two-year booster if you travel to these areas regularly. Pre-exposure shots are no longer the painful abdominal shots, but rather five shots in the upper arm spaced over a period of a few weeks. If you are bitten while on travel, get a rabies immune globulin (RIG) shot at the site of the puncture.

More from this seminar to come. And as always, thanks for educating yourself to benefit dogs and their owners!

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MD/DC Adoptions & Events

Mid-Atlantic Great Dane Rescue League

MAGDRL web: <http://www.magdrl.org>

MAGDRL events: <http://www.lissa.net/Joya/MAGDRL.htm>

"A dog is the only thing on earth that loves you more than he loves himself." - Josh Billings