



Philadelphia Department of Public Health
Division of Disease Control

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RABID KITTEN CONFIRMED IN NORTHEAST PHILADELPHIA IN THE SETTING OF A RABIES VACCINE SHORTAGE - August 21, 2008

The Philadelphia Department of Public Health Division of Disease Control is investigating a laboratory confirmed case of rabies in a feral (wild) kitten in northeast Philadelphia. The rabid kitten is a small, black and white domestic short haired male, who was found among a colony of approximately 12 other feral cats in late July 2008. The kitten was originally adopted by an unsuspecting family living in northeast Philadelphia and was then brought to medical attention on August 18 with symptoms consistent with rabies. The kitten tested positive in the public health laboratory on August 20. An investigation was initiated by the Division of Disease Control (DDC) to identify any persons who were exposed to this rabid kitten. Thus far, DDC has identified 17 exposed persons and has recommended that each exposed person receive rabies postexposure prophylaxis.

Since 1989, routine surveillance of rabies in Philadelphia has identified 55 laboratory-confirmed rabid animals (24 raccoons, 10 cats, 10 bats, 10 skunks, 3 woodchucks, 1 fox, 1 deer, and 1 dog). This is the first confirmed case of rabies in a domestic animal in Philadelphia since 2005.

Defining Exposure and Criteria for Recommending Postexposure Prophylaxis:

- We recommend that anyone who was bitten, scratched or was exposed to the saliva of this rabid kitten during the time frame of August 8–18 receive rabies postexposure prophylaxis (PEP) as soon as possible.
- Rabies PEP in individuals who have not previously received rabies vaccine consists of rabies immune globulin (RIG) and 5 vaccinations administered on days 0, 3, 7, 14, and 28. Those who have previously received pre-exposure vaccination, such as veterinarians and animal handlers, require only 2 vaccinations on day 0 and 3.

What to Do About the Other Cats in the Feral Colony:

- The rabid kitten was part of a feral cat colony found in the Parkwood area in Philadelphia. Neighborhood families may have adopted some of these other kittens. Since these animals may also be carrying rabies, it is important that they be tested for rabies.
- If a person has adopted any of the other cats from this particular feral colony, they should be instructed to call the Philadelphia Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) as soon as possible at 267-385-3891 so that the animal can be tested for rabies. Unfortunately, the animal must be euthanized to be tested for rabies.
- PAWS staff will also be working in this neighborhood to look for cats and kittens from this feral colony.
- Persons who have cared for these other cats should also call the Division of Disease Control (DDC) to report their exposure at 215-685-6741.

Update on the Availability of Rabies Vaccine:

- There is currently a nationwide shortage of rabies vaccine due to increased demand and an interruption in vaccine supply. Vaccine is currently being reserved primarily for postexposure prophylaxis and only following consultation with the health department.
- Emergency Departments involved in the care of persons exposed to this rabid kitten may order larger quantities of rabies vaccine through their usual vendor. Contact DDC at 215-685-6741 (215-686-1776 after hours).
- Novartis, the supplier of RabAvert vaccine is currently the only supplier of rabies vaccine. It is unclear when the shortage will end.
- All healthcare providers must obtain a password for vaccine orders that can be obtained after consultation with local or state health departments. Vaccine should continue to be administered as soon as possible for high risk rabies exposures, such as actual bites from high-risk animals (bats, raccoons, skunks, fox and other carnivorous animals) that are not available for testing, as well as known rabid animals.
- In lower risk situations (e.g., non-bite exposures, bites from healthy dogs/cats), vaccine administration should involve consultation with the health department. All efforts should be made to locate and confine healthy domestic animals (dogs, cats, ferrets) involved in bite cases for 10 days of observation, rather than starting rabies PEP immediately. This will aid in conserving the available vaccine supply.
- Dogs, cats and other animals showing signs of rabies at the time of the bite (i.e., unprovoked aggression, impaired locomotion, varying degrees of paralysis, extreme depression, etc.) should be evaluated immediately by a veterinarian and euthanized for testing if indicated.

For additional information, please contact DDC at 215-685-6741. After-hours, call the City Hall operators at 215-686-1776 and ask to speak with the person on-call for the Division.