



## Rabies: Awareness for Protecting the Whole Family

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We all remember the story of “Old Yeller,” the heroic dog that had defended his family from a rabid wolf. Tragically, Travis was forced to shoot his faithful companion because he could not risk exposing his family to the fatal disease. Unfortunately this story is still a reality today. We just celebrated World Rabies Day, September 28th to globally increase the awareness of rabies prevention. Thanks to modern vaccinations, we now have methods to control the disease and have nearly eliminated human fatalities in the United States.

Rabies is a huge problem worldwide where one person dies every 10 minutes from rabies. Exposure comes primarily from animal bites where most cases are in Asia and Africa. Rabies is an infectious viral disease affecting the nervous system. It is spread through saliva from bite wounds from a rabid or contagious animal. In Oregon, we have an extremely low incidence of rabies. In fact, the only known cases in Deschutes County are found in migratory bats. Two have been reported to date this year. But that does not mean that there is no risk of rabies here. Earlier this year in Cave Junction, Oregon, rabies was identified and confirmed in a domestic goat. Increased surveillance and testing of terrestrial animals in the local area turned up 3 cases of rabies in foxes.

Bats play an important role in our ecosystem. They feed primarily at night on insects and can eat nearly a thousand flying insects hourly. In Central Oregon, the bats hibernate and become active in the late spring until the fall and are active primarily in warm weather. Most often, humans are exposed to rabies picking up a supposed injured bat or one the cat dragged in. If you find a bat during daylight hours it should be avoided as it is most likely unhealthy. If bitten or scratched by a bat, clean the wound thoroughly and if possible save the whole bat for testing.

Vaccination of your pet against rabies can protect your entire family and is extremely important. Dogs and cats should be vaccinated after 3 months of age and kept current with boosters throughout their lives. Your veterinarian can explain specific recommendations for inoculation. Although state law only mandates vaccination of dogs at the present time, cats are extremely likely to get exposed. Nationally, twice as many cats are reported positive to rabies than dogs. “Garfield” is the ideal predator and more likely to come into contact with bats in their nocturnal feeding habits. It is state law to quarantine animals at least 6 months after

exposure to a bat, unless it has been confirmed negative to rabies with testing. If a member of your family is bitten, even if it is from a household pet, it is important to consult your healthcare provider. It is Oregon State law that cats, dogs and ferrets be quarantined for at least 10 days after biting a human. If a bite occurs from another animal especially a bat, euthanasia and testing is recommended.

Oregon law states that unvaccinated pets like cats, dogs and ferrets that come into contact with a wild animal especially bats be quarantined for at least 6 months or be euthanized. The contact animal is considered positive unless confirmed negative through testing. If the pet is vaccinated against rabies but contacts a rabid animal, then immediate revaccination is necessary and observation for 45 days with the pet owner. If any illness suggesting rabies develops then euthanasia and testing should be done.

In our modern lifestyle we can become complacent and forget the importance of measures to combat certain diseases. So to protect your whole family make sure to get “Ole Yeller” vaccinated and don’t forget “Puss” as well. It is a serious disease with serious consequences that can be easily prevented.