

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
2016 – PAHAN – 338-06-14 – ADV
Rabies Pennsylvania:
Human Implications – Reminder



DATE:	6/14/2016
TO:	Health Alert Network
FROM:	Karen Murphy, Secretary of Health
SUBJECT:	Rabies in Pennsylvania: Human Implications – Reminder
DISTRIBUTION:	Statewide
LOCATION:	Pennsylvania
STREET ADDRESS:	n/a
COUNTY:	n/a
MUNICIPALITY:	n/a
ZIP CODE:	n/a

This transmission is a “Health Advisory” and provides important information for a specific incident or situation; it may not require immediate action.

HOSPITALS: PLEASE SHARE WITH ALL MEDICAL, PEDIATRIC, INFECTION CONTROL, NURSING, AND LABORATORY STAFF IN YOUR HOSPITAL

EMS COUNCILS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE

FQHCs: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE

LOCAL HEALTH JURISDICTIONS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE TO YOUR MEMBERSHIP

In response to a recent human exposure to a rabid fox in Luzerne County, the Pennsylvania Department of Health (PADOH) is releasing the following information regarding Rabies in Pennsylvania.

Rabies is an important zoonotic disease known to affect all mammals including humans; mammals represent the only known reservoirs of the disease. Rabies is a serious infection of the nervous system caused by a virus which is usually transmitted to humans by a bite or scratch from a wild infected animal, most commonly, raccoon, fox, bat or a skunk. The rabies virus is also transmitted by the bite of unvaccinated rabies-infected dogs and cats. Rabies almost always results in death if a bite or scratch from a rabid animal (an animal infected with rabies) is not treated at the time of exposure and symptoms of an infection develop.

It is important to note that rabies is endemic in Pennsylvania and that raccoons (1st), cats (2nd), and bats (3rd) represent the animals most responsible for human exposure to rabies. In Pennsylvania, rabies has been also been reported in opossums, groundhogs, cattle, horses, and other domestic animals. Small rodents such as hamsters, squirrels, chipmunks, mice, and rabbits are very rarely infected with the rabies virus.

How is Rabies Spread to Humans?

Rabies is transmitted to humans and other animals through close contact with saliva from infected animals (i.e. bites, scratches, licks on broken skin and mucous membranes).

How is Rabies Prevented?

Vaccination of animals against rabies, and not feeding, approaching, or handling wild or stray animals are the primary methods of rabies prevention. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania law requires all dogs and non-feral cats three months of age and older to be vaccinated against rabies. Booster vaccinations must be administered periodically to maintain lifelong immunity.

The Pennsylvania Department of Health assists health care providers to determine potential risk of rabies exposure, tests animals for rabies, and advises on management of human rabies exposures.

Categories of Health Alert messages:

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

This information is current as of June 14, 2016, but may be modified in the future.
