

# INTRODUCTION

## RABIES MANUAL

In December 1991 with assistance from state and private agencies, the Connecticut Veterinary Medical Association published the "State of Connecticut Manual for Rabies Management and Protocols". It served as an essential reference for veterinarians and other professionals who were expected to provide assistance and advice regarding rabies. In large part this web site is based on the manual and includes updated information with links that will provide further information about rabies and who to contact in the event of a rabies incident:

## RABIES

Rabies is a viral disease of mammals caused by infection of the brain and spinal cord. In domestic animals and people, infection with the rabies virus is nearly always fatal. In many areas of the developing world including Asia, Africa, and South America, rabies infection is most often spread by dog bites. In the United States, where rabies in dogs has been largely eliminated, rabies is still widespread in wildlife populations requiring ongoing prevention and control activities. These activities include testing suspect rabid animals, enforcing animal vaccination and quarantine laws, and evaluating potential human and domestic animal exposures.

In 1991, a resurgence of rabies in Connecticut followed the spread of rabies in raccoons from southern states and resulted in the first rabid domestic animals in the state since the 1940's. The raccoon rabies outbreak reached Connecticut in March of that year, entering Fairfield County through New York State. Over the following 4 years, it spread to all eight counties and remains present throughout the state with raccoons serving as a source of rabies virus that can be spread to other animals.

People get rabies mainly from the bite of an infected animal. Other means of transmission are very rare. Symptoms in people usually appear 3-8 weeks after exposure starting with a flu-like illness and later characterized by confusion, agitation, hallucinations, and muscle paralysis. Once clinical signs of rabies appear, the disease progresses rapidly and is fatal. However, disease can be prevented by thorough wound cleaning and timely medical treatment that includes administration of one dose of immune globulin (antibodies) and four doses of vaccine over 2 weeks.

Rabies virus is also present in bats. All bat species in Connecticut feed on insects and normally avoid contact with other animal species and people. However, rabies infected bats occasionally bite and can transmit rabies.

The state response to rabies is an interagency effort coordinated by the Department of Agriculture that includes the Departments of Environmental Protection and Public Health and the University of Connecticut as well as the Connecticut Veterinary Medical Association and municipal control officers.