For Immediate Release

September 28 is World Rabies Day; learn ways to avoid deadly disease

MORGANTOWN, WV (Sept. 25, 2018) — World Rabies Day serves to remind people to vaccinate their pets against this viral disease so any encounter with a rabid animal will be less dangerous.

World Rabies Day this year takes place on Friday, Sept. 28. Another goal of the observance, created by the Global Alliance for Rabies Control, is to focus on rabies elimination, aiming to have no human deaths from canine rabies by the year 2030.

Rabies is a serious viral infection of the central nervous system, usually passed to humans through the bite of a rabid animal. Occasionally, rabies can be transmitted if the saliva of an infected animal gets into a fresh scratch, break in the skin or through contact with mucous membranes such as the eyes, mouth or nose. Once an animal or a human contracts rabies, it is almost always a fatal disease.

In June 2018, a rabid raccoon was found in the National area of Monongalia County; another one was discovered in the same area in late July. In both instances, raccoons had encounters with local residents’ pets.

Rabid animals such as raccoons can spread rabies to other animals like dogs, cats and livestock. If a pet has an encounter with a rabid animal and is unvaccinated, then it is recommended for it to be put down. If it is not put down, it would be mandated into a six-month quarantine.

If a pet that has encountered a rabid animal is vaccinated, then it must be observed for 45 days to be sure that it is safe. Rabid animals are extremely dangerous and can be aggressive. If an animal is confirmed to be rabid, it is put down for safety reasons. To avoid this, it is important to make sure your pets have gotten their vaccinations.
And people who aren’t vaccinated against rabies are reminded to consider getting inoculated if they often work with animals or if they plan to leave the country, depending on their destination. Monongalia County Health Department offers an International Travel Clinic in which a physician will help you determine how to prepare medically for a trip.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (cdc.gov), early symptoms of rabies in people are similar to those of many other illnesses, including fever, headache and general weakness or discomfort. As the disease progresses, more specific symptoms appear and may include insomnia, anxiety, confusion, slight or partial paralysis, excitation, hallucinations, agitation, hypersalivation or an increase in saliva, difficulty swallowing and hydrophobia, or a fear of water. Death usually occurs within days of the onset of these symptoms.

In addition to having pets vaccinated, there are other ways to avoid rabid animals and to help reduce the disease. Do not handle or feed wild animals or bring them into your home; place litter in closed garbage cans and teach your children not to handle any unfamiliar animals.

If traveling abroad, take extra caution to avoid animals. In certain areas of the world, rabies in dogs is still a major problem and treatment might be difficult to obtain.

It’s also recommended that animal caretakers keep pets supervised, and make sure to have them spayed or neutered to help reduce the number of unwanted animals who could go on to develop rabies.

In the Mountain State, the West Virginia Oral Rabies Vaccination Project has dramatically helped to reduce the disease by dropping baits that vaccinate raccoons against rabies in areas where the wild animals are likely to find them. The baits, which are not harmful to humans and their pets, should still be avoided.

The bait drop is a cooperative effort between the U.S. and West Virginia Departments of Agriculture, the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (DNR), the West Virginia Bureau for Public Health and local health departments such as Monongalia County Health Department.

If you are considering a rabies vaccine for yourself or a family member, monchd.org/immunizations.html or call 304-598-5119 for an appointment. For more information on MCHD, check out monchd.org and follow us on Facebook and Twitter @WVMCHD for up-to-date information on health and safety.

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