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Alaska's Comprehensive Rabies Control Program - An Unqualified Success

Beginning in 1975, the State of Alaska initiated a comprehensive Rabies Control Program to reduce the number of unvaccinated dogs and to reduce the number of persons receiving unnecessary post-exposure rabies prophylactic treatment.

A program was begun to provide consultation and free biologics for all persons under consideration for post-exposure rabies prophylaxis. From 1975 thru 1980, 182 persons received post-exposure rabies prophylaxis with Human Rabies Immune Globulin (HRIG) plus Duck Embryo Vaccine (DEV), or more recently HRIG plus Human Diploid Cell Vaccine (HDCV). Since 1976, no persons in Alaska are known to have received post-exposure rabies prophylaxis other than through the State program. Drugs are provided only after the determination by the State that circumstances dictate drug therapy. Biologics used to treat the 182 people who underwent anti-rabies prophylaxis cost \$47,802.

From 1975 thru 1980, 176 animals were confirmed as rabies positive by fluorescent antibody examination at the Virology-Rabies Laboratory of the State of Alaska. Rabies is endemic in the arctic and red fox populations and foxes accounted for 149 of 176 (84%) of the rabies positive animals. However, 146 of 182 (80%) persons requiring post-exposure prophylaxis were exposed to rabid dogs. Of the rabid dogs involved in contacts necessitating drug treatment, none were properly vaccinated. Puppies six months of age or less were involved in six incidents resulting in exposure of 79 of 182 (43%) persons treated.

An aggressive animal vaccination program was initiated with the enactment of regulations requiring rabies vaccination of dogs and cats. To provide animal vaccination to rural areas, a program utilizing trained vaccinators was developed. These lay vaccinators are certified by the State to administer free rabies vaccination. A standard vaccination certificate was adopted and a single vaccine type provided free of charge to all veterinarians and certified lay vaccinators throughout the state. Data from more than 56,000 completed certificates from vaccinated dogs have been computerized to allow immediate retrieval of animal vaccination status.

During 1975-1980, the State Program handled consultations involving approximately 2,751 exposures which were thought to possibly require institution of post-exposure rabies prophylaxis. Of the 2,751 people who were exposed and would presumably have been treated in the absence of the State program, 2,569 were advised that treatment should not be instituted after a review of the circumstances of the exposure.

Cost savings to the state from avoiding treatment of these 2,569 people during 1975-1980 was approximately \$3,220,241.