



Bulletin No. 19

September 6, 1990

Rabies Control Program and Wolf Hybrids

In 1975, the Alaska Division of Public Health initiated a Rabies Control Program based in the Sections of Laboratories and Epidemiology.

Consultation and Biologics

The Section of Laboratories maintains a Virology-Rabies Laboratory in Fairbanks which provides 24-hour a day testing of animals for rabies. The Virology-Rabies Laboratory and the Section of Epidemiology provide 24-hour a day consultation on all animal exposures where anti-rabies prophylaxis is considered. The program provides free of charge Human Rabies Immune Globulin (HRIG) and Human Diploid Cell Vaccine (HDCV) to all persons requiring anti-rabies treatment. Consultation is required and medication is released only when review of all information about the exposure dictates treatment. If the epidemiologist and rabies virologist determine that an exposure does not warrant anti-rabies prophylaxis, medication is not released, even if the attending physician disagrees with the decision, fortunately a rare circumstance.

Animal Control

In 1978, a program was developed to improve dog vaccination and animal control throughout the state. Regulations were revised in accordance with recommended guidelines from the National Association of Public Health Veterinarians; in addition, they included provisions to establish a lay vaccinator program. A course was developed to train and certify lay vaccinators to administer rabies vaccine to dogs and cats throughout Alaska. Rabies vaccine is purchased by the state and distributed free of charge along with tags and the standard certificates to all lay vaccinators and to all private veterinarians. Rabies vaccination is administered free of charge by all lay vaccinators. Private veterinarians may not charge for vaccine provided by the state, but may charge for administration of the vaccine.

Recently, attention has focused on wolf hybrids because of highly publicized bite incidents. These incidents serve to underscore public health concerns in two major areas: rabies prevention and responsible ownership.

At this time, no rabies vaccine has been approved for use in wolves or wolf hybrids. The Rabies Control Program is in agreement with the official position of the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians, that states: "Wildlife Vaccination: Vaccination is not recommended since no rabies vaccine is licensed for use in wild animals. It is recommended that wild or exotic animals susceptible to rabies should not be kept as pets. Offspring borne to wild animals bred with domestic dogs or cats will be considered as wild animals."

Some private veterinarians may recommend that wolves or wolf hybrids be vaccinated against rabies with a killed rabies vaccine that is licensed for use in dogs. Because no rabies vaccine is approved for use in wolves or wolf hybrids, the Rabies Control Program does not accept such vaccination as valid. If a wolf or wolf hybrid bites a human, the animal is considered to be unvaccinated. In these circumstances, the animal will be destroyed and tested for rabies infection.

Responsibility is an essential ingredient in animal ownership. Decisions about rabies preventive treatment become relevant only after a bite occurs. From 1950-1990, 27 Alaskan children were killed by dogs; since 1980, 13 children have died. Based on a study by the Section of Epidemiology in 1979, approximately 2500 dog bites of sufficient severity to warrant a medical visit for treatment occur every year in Alaska. Owners must be responsible and take appropriate measures to control their pets.

COMPUTER RABIES CERTIFICATES AUTHORIZED

The Rabies Control Program has approved computer generated rabies certificates by Alaska licensed veterinarians provided that the forms contain no less information than that found on the official rabies certificate, Form #50, from the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians. Computer generated forms must include the veterinarian's name and signature.

Rabies certificates will continue to be supplied upon request by the Rabies Control Program. These certificates have the official seal of the State of Alaska and three, no-carbon copies. Rabies certificates also will be available upon request on computer printer, tractor-fed paper so that, provided all computer default settings were set, the computer could print required information onto the certificate.