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SEVERE SHORTAGE OF RABIES VACCINE

Residents with Possible Rabies Exposure Are Urged To Safely Capture Biting Animal

YPSILANTI, Mich., August 25, 2008 — Washtenaw County Public Health Officials have been notified by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) that there is a severe shortage of human rabies vaccine. This shortage is due to decreased vaccine supply and increased demand for rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP). Because of the dangerously low existing supplies, the Washtenaw County Public Health Department (WCPHD) strongly recommends that the public take steps to avoid contact with unfamiliar, wild and stray animals so that they may limit their potential exposure to rabies.

Novartis, currently the only maker of the human vaccine, is now requiring health care providers to confer with public health officials to conduct a patient risk assessment before they may obtain the rabies vaccine directly from them. “Since rabies is a fatal disease if not treated after exposure, we need to ensure appropriate use of the rabies vaccine. We want to avoid a situation where a person positively exposed to rabies is put at increased risk due to depleted vaccine supplies” said Dr. Diana Torres-Burgos, Medical Director for the Washtenaw County Public Health Department.

“We are strongly encouraging people that have had direct contact or a potential bite exposure to safely capture or detain the animal, preferably with help from animal control, so that it can be tested. In many cases people are removing the animal from their home or yard and we are unable to test the animal for rabies. In these cases we must give the person the vaccine, possibly needlessly, because not every animal that bites a person has rabies” said Donna Nussdorfer, Communicable Disease Program Coordinator for the Washtenaw County Public Health Department. **All animal bites and**

exposures to bats should be reported to the Health Department by calling 734-544-6770. Washtenaw County Public Health Department is available to consult regarding the need for PEP and animal testing for rabies.

What Is Rabies? —Rabies is a viral disease that is usually transmitted animal-to-animal, but can also infect humans as a result of an animal bite. Animal bites should always be reviewed carefully to determine if the animal may have rabies. Prompt treatment of the person can prevent the development of rabies, but if symptoms develop, the disease is almost always fatal.

How Is It Spread? —The rabies virus is found in the saliva of an infected animal. The virus is spread through a bite or scratch from an infected animal or through contact with intact mucous membranes. Animals most affected are wild animals such as skunks, raccoons, foxes, wolves, coyotes, and bats. Domestic animals (usually unvaccinated cats, dogs, and horses) can also spread the virus.

How to Prevent It –

1. Have your pets vaccinated. Any pet that comes in contact with wild animals is at risk.
2. Since rabies in this country is primarily a disease of wildlife, an important element of rabies prevention is avoiding wild animals. Do not feed or handle wild animals, especially those that appear aggressive or sick.
3. Bat proof your home. Bats should be excluded from houses and adjacent structures. Such structures should then be made bat-proof by sealing entrances used by bats. Bats should not be captured, handled, or kept as pets. Never keep wild animals as pets.
5. Immunization is also recommended for individuals whose occupations or activities place them at frequent risk of exposure. These include hunters, forest rangers, taxidermists, laboratory workers, stock breeders, veterinarians, spelunkers and slaughterhouse workers.

Additional rabies information is available at:

Washtenaw County Public Health

http://www.ewashtenaw.org/government/departments/public_health/bitesrabies

Center for Disease Control

<http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/>

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