



Public participation in rabies control

In spite of the availability of scientific methods to control rabies in dogs and cats the effective implementation of such rabies control programmes and technologies are dependent on political will, community commitment and sufficient financial resources at the national and local levels. Although rabies is a fatal disease for which there is no cure, it is 100% preventable. All citizens including veterinarians, medical officers, pet owners and general public can help to control rabies in the country. By acting responsibly, people not only contribute to reduce the number of rabies cases, but also to enhance the relationship humans have with their pets and other animals.

What can public do to help control rabies?

- Get the pets such as dogs and cats vaccinated by a veterinarian regularly. First vaccination can be done at as early as 3 weeks. However, if the first vaccination is done before 3 months of age, a booster vaccine should be given at 3 months. Thereafter, annual repeat vaccination is necessary in order to maintain a high protection level against rabies. The veterinarians will advise on the required frequency of vaccination of livestock and other animals such as cattle, goats and horses.

- Reduce the possibility of exposure to rabies by not letting the pets roam free. Sterilisation of pets may decrease roaming tendencies and will prevent them from contributing to the birth of unwanted animals.
- Do not leave exposed garbage or kitchen waste outside, as it may attract stray or wild animals.
- Wild animals should never be kept as pets. This is not only illegal, but also wild animals pose a potential rabies threat to the handlers and others.
- Always observe unfamiliar animals from a distance. A rabid animal may appear tame and friendly, but don't go near it. Teach children never to handle unfamiliar animals.
- Presence of suspected rabid animal should be reported to a relevant local authority¹.

What should you do if your pet has bitten someone?

- Wash the wounds with soap and water. Urge the victim to see a medical doctor immediately and to follow the doctor's recommendations.
- Check with a veterinarian to determine whether your pet's vaccinations are up-to-date.
- Report the bite to the local veterinary and health authorities.
- Do not let the pet stray and don't give the pet away. The animal must be available for observation by a veterinarian or public health official.
- Immediately report any sickness or abnormal behaviour of the pet to the local veterinary and/or health authorities.
- After the recommended observation period which is usually 21 days, get the pet vaccinated for rabies if its vaccination is not up-to-date.
- If the pet died during the observation period, send the carcass or head of the animal immediately to a laboratory for diagnosis of rabies².

¹ Municipal veterinary department, government veterinary surgeon, MOH office or local police

² Presently, laboratory facilities for rabies diagnosis are available at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science in Peradeniya, Medical Research Institute in Borella and Karapitiya National and the enactment of mitigating measures Hospital in Galle.

What should you do if your pet has been bitten?

- Consult a veterinarian immediately for necessary health care and advice.
- Unvaccinated and animals with expired vaccinations will need to be vaccinated immediately.
- The animal should be kept under the owner's control, and observed for a period of at least 45 days.
- If the pet died during the observation period, send the carcass or head of the animal immediately to a laboratory for diagnosis of rabies.

What should you do if your pet is suspected of having rabies?

- Do not let the pet stray. Keep the animal securely chained or in a secured box or cage.
- Consult a veterinarian immediately for necessary advice, particularly to determine whether the pet's vaccinations are up-to-date.
- Report to the local veterinary and/or health authorities.
- The animal should be kept secured and observed for a period of at least 10 days. The animal must be available for observation by a veterinarian or public health official.
- Extreme care should be taken as not to get bitten by the animal when handling and feeding.
- After the recommended observation period, get the pet vaccinated for rabies if its vaccination is not up-to-date.
- If the pet died during the observation period, send the carcass or head of the animal immediately to a laboratory for diagnosis of rabies.

What should you do if you are bitten?

- Do not panic, but don't ignore the bite. Wash the wound thoroughly and vigorously with soap and water.
- Consult a physician immediately and explain how you were bitten. If available, give all information including vaccination records of the animal that has bitten you, to the doctor. If necessary, your physician will give you the post exposure treatment.
- If you are bitten by an unfamiliar animal or wild animal, try to memorise its appearance (kind, colour, size etc.) and where it went after biting you. Provide this information to a relevant local.
- If possible to capture the animal safely, it should be kept in a secured box or cage and inform a relevant local authority.
- The animal should be kept under observation for a period of at least 21 days.

- If the animal died during the observation period, send the carcass or head of the animal immediately to a laboratory for diagnosis of rabies.