



World Rabies Day: Sept 8th

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The mission of World Rabies Day is to raise awareness about the impact of rabies. More than 55,000 people, mostly in Africa and Asia, die from rabies every year-- a rate of one person every ten minutes. The most important source of rabies in humans in other parts of the world is from uncontrolled rabies in dogs. This large impact of rabies on human health in Asia and Africa is due to a lack of animal control infrastructure, lack of rabies vaccination of dogs, and inadequate availability of appropriate medical care and rabies post exposure prophylaxis for humans.

Prior to the 1960s, the dog variant of rabies virus was still endemic to the U.S. Animal control agencies played a vital role in eliminating rabies from dogs in the U.S. and still play an important role in preventing rabies from becoming endemic in dogs and cats in the U.S. by:

- controlling the number of strays
- adopting out spayed/neutered pets that are vaccinated
- enforcing local leash laws
- providing free or low cost rabies vaccination clinics
- educating residents on rabies & proper care of pets

Rabies is still a threat to domestic animal health in Arizona, as rabies is still endemic in bats, skunks, and fox. The Arizona Gray Fox variant and the Central U.S. Skunk variant are endemic primarily in central and southeastern Arizona (counties of Cochise, Gila, Graham, Greenlee, Pima, Pinal, Santa Cruz, and Yavapai). The Arizona Gray Fox variant is also endemic in northern Maricopa County where the southern boundaries of Tonto National Forest interface with the northern reaches of Cave Creek and Carefree. However, bats serve as the most important source of rabies exposure to pets and humans in the U.S. Even in the heart of Phoenix, several rabid bats are found by children and pets each year.

Please educate your clients about the importance of keeping their pets current on rabies vaccination. If a pet is overdue for rabies vaccination and has contact with a bat, fox, or skunk that is unavailable for testing, the owner will have to pay for the 6-month quarantine in an animal control or veterinary facility. In rural areas of the state where coyotes, bobcats, and javelinas have been confirmed with rabies infection, exposures to such animals require the same quarantine. Many owners cannot pay for such extended confinement and must have their pet euthanized.

In Arizona, many veterinarians partner with animal control agencies and animal shelters in their community by volunteering their services during rabies vaccination clinics or by contracting with the agency to provide spaying and neutering. Such collaboration is vital in maintaining animal control infrastructure throughout Arizona. There are many rural communities in Arizona with inadequate veterinary services, and the local animal control agency and shelter struggle to provide the services needed in their community. If you are contacted by an animal control agency or shelter for assistance, please consider contributing your expertise and time for the benefit of the community, animal health, and public health.

For information on World Rabies Day events planned in Arizona, please visit: www.azdhs.gov.