

World Rabies Day 2010

[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC - safer, healthier people.

[Matthew Reynolds] Welcome to this CDC podcast on rabies. I'm your host, Matthew Reynolds. Each year, more than 55,000 people die from rabies worldwide; that's almost one person every 10 minutes. Recommendations from CDC are changing the way people will get shots after being exposed to rabies. With us today to discuss this is Dr. Charles Rupprecht, Chief of the CDC's Rabies Program. Welcome, Dr. Rupprecht.

[Dr. Rupprecht] Thank you, Matthew. It's a pleasure to be here.

[Matthew Reynolds] Let's start with the current situation in the United States. How big is the issue of rabies?

[Dr. Rupprecht] Annually, we live in a sea of rabies. Annually, between seven and ten thousand rabid animals are diagnosed in the United States. Usually, these are wildlife, such as raccoons, skunks, foxes, and bats. Even though most people are exposed to rabies because of a dog or a cat, it's usually wild animals that commonly expose pets to rabies. In this country, we've been able to control rabies in dogs, and more recently, we've been able to vaccinate raccoons and foxes against rabies. Ultimately, this can go a long way towards preventing exposures to people and their pets.

[Matthew Reynolds] Interesting. Now, I know there's a vaccine that can help prevent rabies, and I understand CDC has recommended reducing the number of rabies vaccine shots. What does this mean to the average American?

[Dr. Rupprecht] It's actually very simple. When a person is exposed to rabies, they receive a series of vaccinations. Previously, people were given a total of five shots of vaccine over a month's time. Now, there are four shots given over a 14-day period. That's fewer shots and half the time to complete the series.

[Matthew Reynolds] Are there any exceptions to this?

[Dr. Rupprecht] Yes. People who have been previously vaccinated will only receive two shots. Five shots will still be given to those with lower immunity than normal. Those particular recommendations have not changed.

[Matthew Reynolds] What can people do to help prevent their exposure to rabies?

[Dr. Rupprecht] There are several things people can do. Always stay a safe distance from wild animals and unfamiliar animals. Taking care of pets, being a good supervisor is always very important. Making sure your dog or cat stays up-to-date on their rabies shots. Spaying or neutering your pet can also help control the number of stray animals, which are often exposed to

rabies. Keep pets indoors or on a leash when they're outside so they're less likely to come in contact with wildlife. Place pet food and water inside to help keep wild animals away.

[Matthew Reynolds] Let's shift the focus for a moment and discuss the rabies situation globally. With an estimated 55,000 deaths cause by rabies each year, it seems that it's a significant problem around the world. Tell us a little bit about the worldwide situation.

[Dr. Rupprecht] Globally, rabies is a significant everyday factor in most developing countries. Dogs are a major global reservoir—that is, the way that most people are exposed to rabies. Luckily, we've been able to eliminate rabies among dogs in developed countries and we're making significant progress in developing countries, especially in Latin America.

[Matthew Reynolds] I understand there's a rabies management plan for North America. Tell us about the plan and how it will be utilized.

[Dr. Rupprecht] For many years, professionals involved in rabies prevention and control from Canada, Mexico, and the United States have been meeting to discuss common opportunities, as well as challenges, because we recognize that diseases do not respect international boundaries. For example, we have a common issue along the border between Mexico and the United States concerning rabies in dogs and in wildlife, such as coyotes and foxes. There are also oral vaccination efforts that go on between Canada and the United States on wildlife, focused upon rabies in red foxes and raccoons, and being good neighbors, we recognize that we not only give public health and wildlife problems to each other, but increasingly we have to be involved in solutions. A North American rabies management plan has been developed. This is one solution for the future for cooperation to not only study rabies, but to prevent its introduction from one country into another, and to control rabies within our own borders through common strategies.

[Matthew Reynolds] Where can listeners go to get more information about World Rabies Day or these global initiatives?

[Dr. Rupprecht] Listeners can get more information at www.worldrabiesday.org.

[Matthew Reynolds] Thank you, Dr. Rupprecht. For more information on rabies, please visit www.cdc.gov/rabies.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.