



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Stray Kitten, Scary Problem, Safety First

Public Health Response to a Rabid Kitten — Four States, 2007

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

[Matthew Reynolds] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly broadcast of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Matthew Reynolds. When you think "rabies," you may think of bats in a cave or dogs on the loose, but you probably aren't picturing kittens. Unfortunately, the degree of an animal's 'cuteness' doesn't have any relationship to whether it's healthy – or in a recent case – infected with rabies. To tell us about this case, and discuss the dangers of rabies, the CDC's Dr. Kira Christian is joining us. Welcome to the show, Dr. Christian.

[Dr. Christian] Thank you for having me.

[Matthew Reynolds] Dr. Christian, you and your co-authors just did a report about a stray kitten being "adopted," so-to-speak, by girl's softball team. The kitten turned out to have rabies and sparked a multi-state investigation. Can you tell us more about what happened?

[Dr. Christian] Yes, the softball tournament that was being held in Spartanburg, SC was the focus of the multi-state rabies investigation. This little kitten they found in a box subsequently passed around several different athletic teams was later found to have rabies. We started a multi-state investigation to try and find as many people as possible who had been exposed to this little kitten so we could subsequently administer rabies post-exposure prophylaxis or the rabies vaccines.

[Matthew Reynolds] The softball players had a reaction that I'm sure most of us would have in that situation – to take care of it. And, I'm sure no one thought a tiny kitten could be dangerous, and it seemed healthy at first, right?

[Dr. Christian] Mm mmm. When they first found it, it was apparently bright, alert, and healthy; a little kitten. Reports were that a little kitten was very hungry, very thirsty; acting just like a little kitten should, but later on, after the kitten started to behave abnormally - a little **lethargic**, a little too sleepy for a little kitten of that age - the housemate of the coach of one of the teams brought the little thing into the vet clinic in - where it subsequently ended up being tested for rabies.

[Matthew Reynolds] What happened to the girls – and anyone else – who was exposed? Were they infected?

[Dr. Christian] No. As far we know, there have been no cases of human rabies associated with this softball tournament, so we feel that we're successful in administering the post-exposure prophylaxis or the rabies shots or vaccines to everyone that we felt needed it. Now this again, was result of an extensive investigation lead by the four states to try and locate everyone that had been to that softball tournament.

[Matthew Reynolds] And you feel confident that you were able to locate everyone who was exposed?

[Dr. Christian] We feel...we feel confident that we were able to locate everyone, just because we haven't heard of any reports of human rabies – yes.

[Matthew Reynolds] Well, I understand that rabies is a serious infection. What do you recommend for people who think they've been exposed to a rabid animal?

[Dr. Christian] People that think they have been exposed to a rapid animal should see their physician as soon as they can. The physician should then do an investigation tracing back to see why they thought they were exposed to rabies, what kind of animal, how was the animal behaving, if the animal had bit any other people, those types of questions to then....for the physician to then decide whether or not that person needs the rabies post-exposure prophylaxis.

[Matthew Reynolds] Once the physician gets he information from the patient, how does he or she make the determination about whether to administer rabies treatment? Is there a test to determine whether they are rabies positive?

[Dr. Christian] Unfortunately, there isn't a test to determine whether or not someone has been exposed to rabies. That diagnosis is made after signs are apparent, so it's usually too late by then or after the patient's death. So we use the history to decide whether or not to give the rabies vaccines, and again, it's usually after an investigation looking at what types of animals the patient has been exposed to, if those animals have bitten anyone else, that type of thing, to determine whether or not the vaccines are needed.

[Matthew Reynolds] I recall hearing that the treatment used to prevent rabies is painful and lengthy. Is that still the case?

[Dr. Christian] Well, I might use the word lengthy. It is a series of injections over about a month's time...5 injections over 28 days. Now, yes it is lengthy, and might be a little bit painful...shots into your muscle are not a pleasant experience, however, the alternative is much worst - there is no cure for rabies once symptoms develop.

[Matthew Reynolds] Dr. Christian, what's the lesson from this story?

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[Dr. Christian] Two lessons from this investigation. If you were to come into contact with a stray or un-owned or otherwise unfamiliar animal, then what I would recommend is to call animal control. OK? Be very careful in your interactions with this animal, and if you decide to bring the animal to a veterinarian, this is where the second part of the lesson comes in. Make sure you give a very detailed history to the veterinarian so you and the veterinarian can work together to decide whether or not rabies post-exposure treatment is necessary.

[Matthew Reynolds] And also if you're a parent listening to this and you've got children, make sure they know not to pick up strays as well. Correct?

[Dr. Christian] Yes. Again, any parents listening, make sure you teach your children about their interactions with wild animals, as well the neighborhood, friendly dog that's roaming around the streets. You might not know what kind of animals that friendly little cat or dog has been in contact with.

[Matthew Reynolds] Just because he's familiar doesn't mean he's safe.

[Dr. Christian] Exactly.

[Matthew Reynolds] Where can our listeners get more information about rabies?

[Dr. Christian] There's lots of information for the general public about rabies at CDC's website www.cdc.gov/rabies, spelled r-a-b-i-e-s. Physicians, veterinarians, and health department staff can also find specialized information about rabies prevention and treatment at this site.

[Matthew Reynolds] Dr. Christian, thanks for taking the time to share this information with our listeners.

[Dr. Christian] Absolutely. Thank you for having me.

[Matthew Reynolds] That's it for this week's show. Don't forget to join us next week. Until then, be well. This is Matthew Reynolds for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] To access the most accurate and relevant health information that affects you, your family and your community, please visit www.cdc.gov.