

## **Rabies Can't Affect MY Pet....Can It?**

Guelph – ON, In early 2016, when the raccoon strain of rabies was resurfacing in the province of Ontario, members of the public were saying the same thing: *I didn't even know rabies was still a 'thing'?*

Government agencies across Canada have made significant progress in baiting and prevention, that public concern over rabies was virtually non-existent.

With over 150 confirmed cases of rabies in Ontario since December 2015, public concern over rabies has justifiably risen.

“Rabies is a virus that affects the central nervous system,” says Kristina Cooper, Registered Veterinary Technician (RVT). “Once symptoms show, the virus is almost always fatal.”

It is estimated that one person in the world dies from rabies roughly every nine minutes. (Predominantly in Asia and Africa.)

Cooper, the Provincial Manager of Ontario's Rabies Response Program (RRP), says that mammals, including animals and people, can contract rabies. This usually occurs when an infected animal bites or scratches a person or other animal.

“There are different strains of rabies,” Cooper explains. “Currently, Ontario is seeing bat, fox and raccoon strains. These strains are not limited, though, in transmission to other species.”

This means that an infected bat, fox or raccoon could infect your cat or dog. Regardless of whether or not your family pet leaves your own backyard, it is important to get your cat or dog vaccinated against rabies.

“Bats, skunks, raccoons and foxes often travel in backyards, unknown to home owners,” says Cooper. “Wildlife encounters can happen quickly resulting in wildlife fights with pets, or pets coming across deceased or injured wildlife, all of which can result in the transmission of rabies.”

Vaccinating against rabies is an easy way to help protect pets against the rabies virus, and in many Canadian cities, it is the law. Cooper explains that for most of Ontario, pet owners are legally required to vaccinate all dogs and cats 12 weeks of age and older against rabies.

“There are rabies vaccines that last one or three years,” say Cooper. “The one year vaccine is due every year. The three year vaccine requires the first vaccine to be ‘boostered’ one year later, and then every three years after that.”

Talk to your veterinary health care team to determine the vaccine schedule that would be best for your pet.

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