



World Rabies Day September 8, 2007:
Working Together to Make Rabies History

Rabies is the most deadly, and yet ironically, one of the most preventable diseases known to human kind. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that more than 55,000 human deaths occur each year. These statistics are an underestimate as rabies is often not reportable where the majority of human deaths occur. Over 90 % of the global human rabies deaths occur in Asia and Africa. Between 30 to 50% of these deaths occur in children less than 15 years of age as a result of bites from infected dogs. All of these deaths could be prevented through prompt and proper wound care and administration of post-exposure prophylaxis (vaccine and rabies immunoglobulin) according to WHO guidelines. Many of these untreated exposures could be prevented through comprehensive and coordinated rabies vaccination of dog populations. This approach will result in local elimination of dog-associated strains of rabies viruses, especially if coupled with population management and novel approaches for hard-to-reach animals (<http://www.who.int/rabies>). When rabies is eliminated in its main animal reservoirs, human exposures decline precipitously. Despite the fact that rabies in dogs and humans is relatively easily preventable, this disease remains a low priority in most regions of the world where dog rabies is present.

In order to increase global awareness as to this ongoing tragedy, the first World Rabies Day will be inaugurated on September 8, 2007 and occur every year thereafter. This unique effort was initiated by the Alliance for Rabies Control, a registered UK charity, along with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia, and is being conducted in partnership with many international health organizations, national, state and local public health partners, professional organizations, and commercial pharmaceutical companies (www.worldrabiesday.org). Events for World Rabies Day are being planned on every continent and especially where rabies continues to claim human lives. The objectives of World Rabies Day are:

1. To improve global awareness of rabies and its prevention
2. To promote prevention at the community level including the formulation and support of educational initiatives about rabies prevention and responsible pet ownership
3. To work toward the coordination of global veterinary and medical resources in a 'One Medicine' approach to fight rabies

Why mobilize towards these objectives? As mentioned above, effective tools for dog rabies control and human rabies prevention exist. Moreover, collaborative initiatives towards control of this fatal zoonosis, if imaginatively packaged as part of comprehensive human and animal health delivery, have the capacity to develop and augment public health and veterinary infrastructure in areas of greatest need.

Through the World Rabies Day initiative, awareness and resources will be rallied to a common cause, that is, human rabies prevention, canine rabies elimination, and wildlife rabies control.

Join us in *Working Together to Make Rabies History*.