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Chatham County Line is a community newspaper serving all of Chatham County as well as the southern part of Orange. Our mission is to inform our community by providing a forum "where all voices are heard." We seek all views and ideas about our community, and we report on important matters — including our cultural life — comprehensively and in-depth. Our commitment is to create the best-written, best-edited and most stylish community newspaper anywhere. Chatham County Line is published ten times a year.

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New Rabies Management Guidelines

The National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians (NASPHV) published a compendium of information about rabies prevention and control. It recommends changes which allow more options regarding how to handle rabies exposure in cats, dogs, and ferrets. In June the North Carolina General Assembly ratified changes to NC General Statute 130A-197 based on some of the NASPHV recommendations. Health departments had until October 1, 2017 to consider how to incorporate these recommendations in their programs. Chatham County Health Director Layton Long, and Animal Services Supervisor Alan Canady, made related changes in 2016.

Rabies is a virus that attacks the brain of many types of mammals. It is transmitted through saliva, and brain or nervous system tissue. Most infection is spread through bites or scratches. Untreated, rabies is almost always fatal, and it can be transferred between animals and humans. Signs and symptoms of rabies vary and include: headache, fever, weakness, anxiety, confusion, agitation, hallucinations, insomnia, delirium, light sensitivity, nausea, muscle spasms, paralysis, difficulty swallowing, excessive salivation, stiff neck, coma, and seizures. Once clinical signs appear death usually occurs in 7 to 10 days. There is no cure for rabies. In humans the treatment provided prior to the onset of symptoms can help the body's immune system get ahead of the virus. Once symptoms develop it is too late to stop the progression of the disease.

Rabies treatment involves a series of shots. Initially, an injection of Human Rabies Immune Globulin (HRIG) and a rabies vaccination are given. Then, up to four additional doses of rabies vaccine are required over a 14 day period. If the person has already received a pre-exposure rabies immunization (recommended for people involved in animal rescue, veterinary clinic and animal services staff) then only the initial HRIG and rabies vaccine injections are required. These days the injections are given in the upper arm, like a flu shot, and are relatively painless. A tetanus vaccination should also be given if it has been more than 10 years since the person received one.

The NC General Statute changes states

the Canine Coach

by Valerie Broadway



how health departments and animal services should handle dogs, cats, and ferrets who have, or may have been exposed to the rabies virus. The NC General Statute on rabies does not adopt all of the recommendations from the NASPHV Compendium, but it does give more options than there have been previously.

Prior to these changes unvaccinated, dogs, cats, and ferrets exposed to a rabid animal were euthanized immediately or the owner paid to have the animal placed in strict isolation at the animal shelter or a veterinary clinic for six months. One month before being released the animal would receive a rabies vaccination. Dogs, cats, and ferrets who had been vaccinated prior to exposure, but the owner could not provide documentation were handled in the same manner.

The updated statute allows for shorter quarantine times, and in some situations the animals can be kept at home for observation rather than a strict quarantine. A rabies vaccination is now given within five days of the exposure instead of near the end of quarantine.

For animals who have had a lapse in rabies vaccinations The NASPHV Compendium recommends the option of allowing blood testing to see if there is evidence of an appropriate level of immune response. If the immunity is high

enough the animal may be spared a lengthy quarantine.

Animals with appropriate vaccination history should receive a rabies booster within 96 hours of exposure and should be kept under the owner's control and observation for illness for 45 days. This is not quarantine. If the booster is delayed then the length of the observation period should be increased.

The NC General Statute gives the public health director the authority to determine the length of the quarantine within the accepted guidelines.

Chatham County Animal Services Supervisor Alan Canady, says the new guidelines give more leeway in the length of quarantine times, and offers additional options when animals have lapses in their rabies vaccination schedules.

Rabies vaccinations are required by law for dogs, cats, and ferrets starting at the age of three months old, then a booster in one year. Afterwards, dogs and cats require boosters every three years, and ferrets annually. Chatham Animal Services provides several low cost rabies clinics each year. Most local veterinary clinics offer low cost rabies vaccinations around the same time as the county clinics.

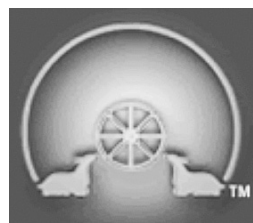
Rabies is a serious communicable disease which is why potential exposure is taken so seriously. The 10th Annual World Rabies Day was just held on September 28. According to the Center for Disease Control around 160 people die every day worldwide from rabies. Chatham County has experienced rabies cases in the past, but Alan Canady says, "We have had zero exposures or positive cases for the past several years. We are VERY fortunate!"

Informational sources used for this column are:

- ncleg.net/Sessions/2017/Bills/Senate/PDF/S74v4.pdf
- www.nasphv.org/Documents/NASPHVRabiesCompendium.pdf
- canons.sog.unc.edu/significant-change-north-carolinas-rabies-law/
- www.cdc.gov/rabies/

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