



FACA Policy Statement

Rabies Vaccination

Florida is a rabies endemic state which means this disease is ever present in Florida's vast and diverse wildlife populations. Types of animals that are considered likely rabies vectors in Florida include raccoons, bats, foxes, bobcats, and otters. Dogs, cats, and other domestic animals that are left outside, especially during nighttime hours, are more prone to encounter these wild animals that are mostly nocturnal. Maintaining a current rabies vaccination for domestic pets serves as a barrier to infection for the humans that live with or encounter them.

Rabies is a viral disease that attacks the Central Nervous System causing symptoms including lethargy, headache, fever, malaise, tremors, ataxia, hallucinations, inability to drink, seizures and death. There have been very few humans infected with rabies worldwide that have recovered, therefore rabies is almost 100% fatal. Animals can show a wide array of symptoms, but it is important for the public to understand that not all animals that are rabid demonstrate aggressive behaviors. Educating the public on the facts surrounding "passive or dumb" rabies is critical in preventing unnecessary exposures.

Though there are a great number of diseases to which domestic animals may be exposed which pose risks to humans, perhaps none has been more widely publicized than rabies. Although human deaths in the United States from rabies are comparatively rare, 5-6 annually, domestic animals show higher positivity rates and the number of wildlife that test positive in Florida is often in the hundreds. Countries that do not have successful, widespread rabies vaccination requirements and programs, experience thousands of human deaths associated with rabies every year. The Philippines is one such example.

Due to the seriousness of this disease in humans and animals, the Florida Animal Control Association believes that having robust rabies immunization programs is the best mechanism to preventing it. FL Statutes, Chapter 828.30 requires that dogs, cats and ferrets, 4 months of age or older, be vaccinated against rabies and requires a rabies certificate, corresponding with the vaccination to be provided to the pet owner and a copy submitted to the animal control authority. See Florida Statute 828.30, vaccination of dogs, cats, and ferrets for additional information.

http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=0800-0899/0828/Sections/0828.30.html

Consequently, FACA recommends that all dogs, cats, and ferrets be immunized against rabies in accordance with label instructions for the vaccine. FACA believes that veterinarians should



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explain to their clients the option to obtain a 3-year vaccine for their pets versus a one year along with the pros and cons of each. FACA supports practices that increase the number of dogs, cats, and ferrets vaccinated against rabies.

Tragically, many pet owners are unaware of the need to vaccinate their animals or are unable to afford the necessary vaccinations. Consequently, animal protection and control agencies that employ veterinarians are encouraged to offer low-cost vaccination clinics in an effort to provide affordable and accessible services for low-income or underserved segments of their respective communities. Public rabies vaccination clinics may be considered as a way to increase the number of animals vaccinated in each community.

FACA believes that strict rabies quarantines and/or laboratory analysis of animals suspected of rabies should be strictly adhered to in close collaboration with the local Public Health Unit.

FACA further recommends that all dogs and all cats released from animal shelters be vaccinated prior to their release. Only killed virus rabies vaccines should be used, and the length of the rabies vaccination should be recognized for the full duration of the vaccine's immunity as indicated on the vaccine label, and in accordance with the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians. Vaccination shall be administered by a licensed veterinarian.

The sale of over-the-counter vaccines should be prohibited by law, because self-administered rabies vaccinations are not recognized by the Florida Department of health or animal control or protection agencies.

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