



Spreading the Word on World Rabies Day

World Rabies Day: Awareness is the Best Defense against Rabies

The world is again joining together on September 28th to raise awareness and understanding about the importance of rabies prevention. Rabies is the oldest and deadliest disease known to mankind and the Cape of Good Hope SPCA is supporting this initiative.

Led by the Alliance for Rabies Control and supported by numerous human and animal health organizations worldwide, World Rabies Day is a unique campaign that brings together hundreds of thousands of people across the world to reinforce the message that rabies is a preventable disease, yet kills 55,000 people needlessly each year, half of which are children under the age of 15¹.

“Rabies is primarily a disease of children, who are particularly at risk from this terrible disease, due to their close contact with dogs, the major global source”, said Dr. Debbie Briggs, Executive Director of the Alliance for Rabies Control. “Children are more likely to suffer multiple bites and scratches to the face and head, both of which carry a higher risk of contracting rabies. Children are often unaware of the danger that dogs transmit rabies and may not tell their parents when a bite, lick, or scratch has occurred from an infected animal”, says Briggs.

Rabies is a viral disease that can be transmitted to animals and humans. The disease is transmitted mainly by bite, but exposure may also occur through contamination of broken skin or mucous membranes with saliva from an infected animal. Once neurological symptoms of the disease develop, rabies is fatal to both animals and humans. The good news is that rabies is easily preventable. “Vaccination prior to possible exposure is a crucial part of health management of domestic animals, and is the single most important factor in rabies prevention”, said Peter Costa, Global Communications Coordinator for the Alliance for Rabies Control.

Rabies prevention starts with the animal owner. Protect yourself, your pet and your community by taking animals to be vaccinated. Avoid stray animals and wildlife. If you are bitten, wash bite wounds with soap and water and seek medical attention immediately. If your pet is bitten, consult your veterinarian immediately. Prompt and appropriate treatment after being bitten and before the disease develops can stop rabies infection and/or prevent the disease in humans and animals.

The World Rabies Day initiative also raises money towards local rabies prevention and control programs, with eight projects funded since 2008. “Through the World Rabies Day campaign we continue to engage all the major stakeholders associated with rabies to take action”, says Costa. “We invite everyone to join the team that is Making Rabies History!”

More information on World Rabies Day can be found at the official web site, www.worldrabiesday.org.

References:

¹ WHO. Human and Animal Rabies, *Rabies: A neglected zoonotic disease*. Available at: <http://www.who.int/rabies/en/>. Accessed on July 23, 2008.