

RABIES



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RABIES

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Texas reported more cases of rabies than any other state in 1947. Eight thousand, nine hundred forty-six cases were reported in the United States. Of that number, 1,191 were in Texas. This figure is especially disturbing in view of the fact that 14 states reported no cases of rabies during that year.

Farm people are likely to feel that the danger of rabies or hydrophobia is largely limited to cities. This is not the case as statistics show foxes are important carriers of the disease. A further breakdown of the more than 8,000 reported cases are figures showing 766 cases in cattle; 40 in horses; a smaller number in sheep, goats and swine; and 728 in wild animals.

Rabies has been known for at least 2,300 years and as yet no adequate control has been achieved in the United States. Unfortunately, it is a disease that could be controlled and soon eradicated if nation-wide support were given to proved methods of control.

CAUSE OF THE DISEASE

Rabies is a virus disease. Viruses are disease producing substances that are too small to be seen with an ordinary microscope. The virus affects the brain and central nervous system. It is transmitted by direct contact, usually through the bite of an infected animal. Although all warm-blooded animals, including mankind, are susceptible, dogs are the usual spreaders of the disease. In all of medical history, there has never been a known recovery from rabies.

SYMPTOMS

The symptoms in dogs are divided into two groupings known as the *Dumb type* and the *Furious type*.

In the *Dumb type* the following is noted: The early symptoms consist of sleepiness and a desire to hide or be alone. These symptoms are soon followed by paralysis of the jaw, throat, voice, and leg muscles. There is no irritability or tendency to bite, but persons may be exposed to rabies by trying to look at the throat. Animals so affected seldom live more than three days after developing symptoms.

Furious rabies is the type better known to most people. In the early stages of this kind of rabies, the dog may seem perfectly normal, in fact, may be more friendly and affectionate than usual. Then he becomes

irritated, and when held or patted he will try to get away. If not promptly freed, the animal will lash out, biting savagely.

The dog then becomes extremely restless and excited, and begins to snap at flies and chase chickens. He will chase a cat or any other creature that happens to be in sight. He is seized with a great desire to roam, and begins to wander everywhere in the neighborhood and all over the countryside. He snaps or bites at any and everything that gets into his way including people, livestock and even sticks and stones. By this time, the dog's eyes are glazed, always open and his voice changes into a curious hoarse bark. In a few days he is stricken with paralysis. The paralysis gradually creeps over his body until he lies down one final time and can't get up. Then he dies.

DIAGNOSIS

The positive diagnosis is made in the laboratory of the State Department of Health. The head of the suspected animal is packed in ice, and placed in double metal containers to prevent leakage or spilling. Veterinarians are able to diagnose most cases of rabies in the live animal. With a history of the symptoms and an opportunity to study the animal's behavior, the experienced veterinarian can readily recognize the classical symptoms. However, in any case that involves humans it is wise to have a laboratory examination made.

Many dogs have been destroyed because they have been suspected of having rabies when, in truth, they were suffering with "running fits" due to other causes.

An animal suspected of having rabies should not be killed. It should be put in quarantine and observed. It has been demonstrated that animals destroyed early in the disease often do not show positive findings on laboratory examination.

ERADICATION

No other disease of animals in this country can be eradicated with so little effort as would be required to eliminate rabies.

It is not communicated through the air, by insects, or by contact, except if the victim be wounded. Significantly, it is communicated only by the bite of a rabid animal and, with few exceptions, only by bite of the dog. It has been shown repeatedly in outbreaks in this country that the disease disappears from a locality when 60 percent or more of the dogs are vaccinated.

PREVENTION

Prevention of rabies in the individual dog is accomplished by annual vaccination. The quality of the vaccine has improved in the last few years. And while 100 percent protection is not obtained for all dogs, it still remains a very effective weapon against rabies.

From the community standpoint, prevention is best obtained by vaccination of all owned dogs and the elimination of strays.

TREATMENT

There is no treatment for rabies, once the symptoms appear. Applying the Pasteur treatment to animals that have been exposed is not as effective as in humans.

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