



A PREVENTABLE KILLER OF PETS AND PEOPLE

ABCD: Rabies can kill cats, too

Edinburgh, 28 September – On the occasion of World Rabies Day, held on 28 September, the European Advisory Board on Cat Diseases (ABCD) published the first European prevention and management guidelines for rabies in cats.

Rabies is a deadly disease caused by a virus that attacks the nervous system. The virus is secreted in saliva and is usually transmitted to people and animals by a bite from an infected animal. Once symptoms of the disease develop, rabies is nearly always fatal to both animals and humans.

Rabies, one of the oldest and most feared diseases of humans and animals, occurs worldwide. In the past years however, large regions in Europe have become free of terrestrial rabies as a result of the vaccination programmes of foxes. Rabid animals are the only source of virus.

Suspect any sudden change in behaviour

Most clinical signs are related to a virus-induced central and peripheral nervous system dysfunction, which can trigger dramatic nervous and behavioural changes, such as aggression, restlessness and ataxia. *“Any sudden onset of unjustified aggressive behaviour in cats should be considered highly suspicious, confirms Tadeusz Frymus, ABCD member and head of the Division of Infectious diseases and epidemiology at Warsaw Veterinary Faculty. “Aggressive behaviour towards humans is unusual in normal, healthy cats.”*

Rabies should be suspected not only when there has been a recent history of a bite by or exposure to a rabid animal but also where an unvaccinated cat may have been in contact with potentially infected wildlife, including bats.

Vaccination can save lives

However, the good news is that rabies is preventable. Rabies vaccination has been shown to induce protective immune responses following a single vaccination. *“Currently available inactivated vaccines are safe and very efficient, and they induce an excellent immunity which often persists much longer than 1 year, Professor Frymus explains, adding that “every outdoor cat should be vaccinated in countries or regions where rabies is endemic”.*

“Although current vaccines show really high efficacy, new vaccinal approaches against rabies such as recombinant live vector technologies are under consideration in Europe” announces Jean-Christophe Thibault, Merial's Scientific and Technical Director for Biologicals. “They display promising advantages over traditional vaccines: not only are they safe, efficient and do not require rabies virus to be handled, but they also induce less inflammation at the site of injection due to the absence of any adjuvant”.

Don't import death

Unvaccinated cats and dogs may become infected with rabies following contact with rabid wildlife. However, such cases have become rare in Western Europe, where the most recent cases of so-called terrestrial rabies could be traced to illegally imported, infected pets from rabies-endemic regions in Africa. The ABCD therefore urges veterinary practitioners to remain alert for signs of rabies in cats and dogs, even in rabies-free areas.

For further details and downloads of the full-text ABCD Guidelines of rabies in cats, please visit www.abcd-vets.org. There you will also find recommendations for specific situations, such as breeding catteries and cats undergoing corticosteroid treatment.

The guidelines on rabies were adopted at the eighth meeting of the ABCD, held in Uppsala (Sweden) on 18-20 June 2008. At the meeting, the panel also discussed FIP in cats, for which guidelines are currently in preparation.

Notes to editors

- The European Advisory Board on Cat Diseases is an independent panel of 17 leading veterinarians from ten European countries, with an expertise in immunology, vaccinology and/or feline medicine. The ABCD was set up to compile guidelines for the prevention and management of major feline infectious diseases in Europe, based on current scientific knowledge.
- Please visit www.abcd-vets.org for detailed background information.
- Interviews, pictures (speakers, diseased cats...) and the ABCD logo are available upon request.
- Animal healthcare company Merial helped set up the European ABCD and supports this initiative through funding. Merial is a world-leading, innovation-driven company, providing a comprehensive range of products to enhance the health, well-being and performance of a wide range of animals. For more information, please see www.merial.com.
- World Rabies Day (www.worldrabiesday.org), organised by the Alliance for Rabies Control, 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.

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