World Rabies Day: September 28, 2017

A Day of Global Focus on the Continuing Threat of Rabies

No doubt about it—the US has made remarkable progress in controlling rabies over the past several decades.\(^1\) But this is no time to become complacent. The risk of human exposure to this virus through an infected animal remains all too real in the US.\(^1,2\) Additionally, with global travel in the 21st century, Americans are venturing into parts of the world in which rabies is still endemic and could be returning home unaware that they have been exposed to the rabies virus.\(^1,2\)

This is an urgent medical situation since once symptomatic disease develops in a human, rabies is nearly always fatal.\(^2\) That also means that family and friends of these global travelers and healthcare professionals who have provided care to these travelers could all be exposed to the rabies virus.\(^3\) Therefore, we in the US need to remain vigilant and join with people around the world who want to eradicate rabies as a human disease. That is what World Rabies Day is all about—putting an end to the unnecessary suffering that rabies causes.\(^4\)

Transmission of rabies from dogs to humans has been essentially eliminated in the US through the elimination of the canine rabies virus variant.\(^2\) Nonetheless, human cases continue to occur here among people who are exposed to infected wildlife, especially bats.\(^2\) In addition, Americans who travel to other countries in which canine rabies continues to be endemic may be unknowingly exposed to the rabies virus and bring deadly rabies virus infection back with them.\(^2,3\) Surprisingly, nearly one-third of human rabies cases in the US from 2003 to 2015 were diagnosed in people who had been exposed to rabies outside of the US and its territories.\(^2\) The Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention (CDC) note that, regardless of type of exposure, human fatalities due to rabies continue to occur among people who were either unaware of their exposure incident or did not take an exposure incident seriously enough to seek appropriate medical attention.\(^2\,^5\)

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To address this situation and help the rest of the world combat rabies, the Global Alliance for Rabies Control (GARC) created and coordinates World Rabies Day, which occurs on September 28 annually.\(^4\) The theme of World Rabies Day 2017 is “Rabies: Zero by 30,” which supports the common goal of ending human deaths due to canine-transmitted rabies by the year 2030, a goal shared by GARC, the World Health Organization, the World Organisation for Animal Health, and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization.\(^4\) GARC developed a campaign called “End Rabies Now” to highlight this work and engage partners and supporters around the world to get involved.\(^6\)

**GARC’s “End Rabies Now” campaign that supports World Rabies Day has a simple, yet powerful call to action against rabies: “99.9% fatal, 100% preventable.”**\(^6\)

**World Rabies Day: The First and Only Global Day of Action and Awareness for Rabies Prevention**

To achieve the goal of eliminating human deaths due to canine rabies, GARC coordinates World Rabies Day activities and supports healthcare professionals and their organizations in hosting their own local World Rabies Day events.\(^4\) The GARC website [https://rabiesalliance.org/world-rabies-day/event-resources](https://rabiesalliance.org/world-rabies-day/event-resources) provides free access to a comprehensive toolkit, logos in multiple languages to download and use, additional awareness resources, and free online educational courses about rabies and rabies control that can be used by event hosts to meet local needs.\(^7\)
Newsletter feeds and updates about World Rabies Day 2017 are available through Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/GlobalAllianceforRabiesControl) and Twitter (https://twitter.com/RabiesAlliance).

The “End Rabies Now” campaign cites an African proverb to inspire this global effort against the threat of rabies: “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

For More Information

World Rabies Day: https://rabiesalliance.org/world-rabies-day

GARC: https://rabiesalliance.org/

End Rabies Now: https://endrabiesnow.org/
REFERENCES


