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TO: Colorado Veterinarians

SUBJECT: Skunk Rabies in Eastern Colorado – 2008

Dear Colorado Practitioners:

We want to inform you of issues surrounding the apparent return of terrestrial rabies in eastern Colorado and make recommendations in the management of rabies. When rabies is being endemically transmitted in a terrestrial host, the risk of spillover infections in domestic pets and livestock increases significantly.

During 2007, three Colorado counties, Las Animas, Prowers, and Washington had terrestrial animals diagnosed with rabies. In 2008, Adams, Kit Carson, Yuma, and Arapahoe counties have had skunk rabies reported. The most recent rabid skunk was found in Kiowa county. This data suggests that skunk rabies is circulating throughout most of eastern Colorado and is moving westward toward the Front Range.

To determine the distribution of skunk rabies, CDPHE, the State Veterinarian's Office and the Division of Wildlife have established a skunk rabies surveillance project. Details of this project are attached. Veterinarians are encouraged to report any suspect rabid skunks or other animals to their local public health agency.

Because the presence of rabies circulating in a local skunk population increases the risk of rabies exposures to other animals, and subsequently people exposed to those animals, the following recommendations are provided to reduce the risk of rabies exposure:

Domestic Animals:

1. Companion animals should be currently vaccinated with an approved rabies vaccine according to the guidelines outlined in the Compendium of Animal Rabies Prevention and Control, 2008. Colorado law requires rabies vaccinations to be administered by a licensed veterinarian. Owner administered vaccine will not be recognized by the public health department if the animal has been exposed to rabies.
2. Veterinarians, in conjunction with local public health agencies, may want to consider holding community rabies vaccination clinics to educate the public on rabies prevention and insure domestic pets are currently immunized.

3. Dogs and cats involved in a human bite must be reported to animal control or public health and be held in a 10-day quarantine or submitted for rabies testing.
4. Pets and livestock exposed to potentially rabid skunks must be reported to animal control or local public health. The 10-day quarantine does NOT apply to these situations. The management of exposed pets depends on the circumstances of the exposure and rabies vaccination status of the animal. This protocol can be viewed at: http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/dc/Zoonosis/rabies/Exposed_pets.pdf.
5. Veterinarians should discuss vaccinating livestock against rabies with clients. In particular, vaccination should be considered for equines, seed stock, and dairy cattle or other high value stock. Owners can vaccinate their livestock under the direction of their veterinarian, although, again, owner administered vaccination would not be recognized by public health authorities in exposure situations.

Biosafety for Veterinary Personnel and Persons Handling Suspected Rabid Animals:

1. Veterinarians should consider rabies in their differential diagnosis whenever they are examining an animal with a rapidly progressive neurological presentation.
2. Persons having contact with a suspect animal should be minimized and limited to, if possible, staff that have had pre-exposure rabies immunization.
3. Clinic staff should review and follow biosafety protocols. Suspect animals should be isolated to prevent any direct contact with other clinic patients, staff, and the public. Respiratory isolation is not necessary.
4. Use appropriate protective clothing and equipment to avoid getting animal fluids onto your clothing, eyes, nose or mouth. At a minimum, this means impervious latex or rubber gloves while examining an animal. If handling a suspected rabid animal carcass or removing a head, a face shield, rubber gloves, and coveralls are recommended.
5. Clean personal protective equipment, knives, coolers, and other contaminated items with hot, soapy water or an alcohol or bleach sanitizer. Wash contaminated clothing in a regular hot wash/dryer cycle. Contaminated surfaces can be cleaned with 1:10 bleach/water solution. WASH hands with a sanitizer.
6. Pre-exposure rabies prophylaxis should be considered for any staff, such as veterinary technicians, that might have direct animal contact. It would not be indicated for administrative staff or persons with indirect animal contact. However, currently there is a national shortage of human rabies vaccine due to manufacturing problems. Sanofi Pasteur, maker of IMOVAX rabies vaccine and Novartis, maker of RabAvert, are currently only releasing vaccine for post-exposure prophylaxis. Veterinarians can identify staff that would be eligible for

vaccination or in need of a booster dose in anticipation of additional supplies being available to the market by July 2008.