1995 Rabies Summary

Submissions for rabies testing (n=477) and the number of rabies positive specimens (n=16) were the lowest totals in over twenty years. All positive specimens were bats. Reasons for this decrease include normal temporal variance, enforcement of the 10-day quarantine for biting domestic animals in lieu of testing, and better screening of surveillance specimens. Given the static nature of rabies in the state and decreasing fiscal resources, tighter screening of specimens that began several years ago will continue. The lower number of specimens does not appear to be adversely affecting the sensitivity of rabies surveillance as evidenced by the discovery of rabid skunks in 1992 and 1994 from areas with no history of terrestrial mammal rabies and a statistically significant increase in the percentage of bats testing positive over the past two decades.

Domestic dogs (n=144) and cats (n=141) accounted for 60% of total tests, although since 1975 only 1 positive cat has been reported. The number of bats tested, 88, was the lowest total in twenty years, however 16 (18%) tested positive . Between 1977 and 1995 the positivity rate for bats has been increasing, ranging from 11%-20% with a mean of 15.6%. The number of people receiving rabies prophylaxis after being exposed to a bat has also increased during this period. This may reflect better recognition and reporting of exposures or an actual increase in exposures due to increasing bat populations, increasing human and pet populations encroaching into bat habitat, an increase in the incidence of rabies in bats, or a combination of these or other factors.

Thirty-six persons were known to have received preventative rabies treatment although this under estimates actual treatments since it is not a reportable condition. Ten persons were treated after sustaining a dog bite outside the U.S., including three family members exposed to a rabid dog in Venezuela. Eleven person were exposed or had potential exposure to a bat, including five cases in which the bat tested positive for rabies. In three cases persons were treated for exposures they believed involved bats although this could not be confirmed. At a mother's insistence four members of a family started treatment for exposure to their cat that had brought a bat home, although no one was bitten by the bat or cat. The bat subsequently tested negative for rabies and the physician discontinued the series.

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