
Press Release

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CDC Announces at Inaugural World Rabies Day Symposium

For the last several decades, state and local public health authorities in the United States have been working tirelessly on the prevention and control of rabies. Coincident with the recognition of World Rabies Day, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has formally declared the elimination of the type of rabies previously found in dogs in the United States. This declaration is supported by animal rabies surveillance nationally.

“The elimination of canine rabies in the United States represents one of the major public health success stories in the last 50 years,” stated Dr. Charles Rupprecht, Chief of the CDC Rabies Program. “However, there is still much work to be done to prevent and control rabies globally.”

Rabies in humans is preventable, yet accounts for at least 55,000 deaths annually around the world – almost one death every 10 minutes. The World Rabies Day initiative, founded by CDC and the UK charity Alliance for Rabies Control and co-sponsored by the World Health Organization (WHO) and World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), aims to bring together the appropriate stakeholders to raise awareness and funding for rabies prevention and control globally.

“We are looking at this as larger than a one-day event,” says Dr. Deborah Briggs, Executive Director of Alliance for Rabies Control, “This is the first-step in a long-term effort towards human rabies prevention and animal rabies control globally.”

In the United States, canine-rabies elimination was achieved through implementation of dog vaccination and licensing, and stray dog control. “We remain optimistic that this official declaration of canine-rabies free status in the United States could be replicated throughout the Western Hemisphere and elsewhere.” says Rupprecht. However adoption of dogs from other countries with canine-rabies demonstrates the fragile nature of the current canine-rabies-free status of the United States and highlights the need for global control and continued emphasis on rabies prevention and control from the local to national levels.

“The elimination of dog-to-dog transmission of rabies does not mean that people in the US can stop vaccinating their pets against rabies,” warns Rupprecht. “Rabies is ever-present in wildlife and can be transmitted to dogs or other pets. We need to stay vigilant.”

Despite the elimination of canine-rabies, the disease remains a human threat in the US particularly from bats. Rabies also remains a potential threat through spillover infections from wildlife to domestic animals adaptation to new animal reservoirs, movement of potentially infected animals, and lack of adequate vaccination coverage of domestic animals, particularly cats and dogs.

“We can thank the tremendous historical efforts at the state and local levels over the past several decades for the ultimate elimination of canine rabies in the US,” says Dr. Rupprecht. “Our public health infrastructure, including our quarantine stations, local animal control programs, veterinarians, and clinicians all play a vital role in preserving the canine-rabies-free status in the US.”

CDC and its numerous global partners will utilize World Rabies Day as an opportunity to celebrate the successes we have made in rabies prevention and control domestically, while recognizing our responsibility to commit to the challenge of global canine rabies elimination, human rabies prevention, and wildlife rabies control.

For more information about World Rabies Day, please visit the CDC (www.cdc.gov/worldrabiesday (<https://web.archive.org/web/20100112003708/http://www.cdc.gov/worldrabiesday/>)) or World Rabies Day (www.worldrabiesday.org (<https://web.archive.org/web/20100112003708/http://www.worldrabiesday.org/>)) web sites.

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