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PRESS RELEASE
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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

World Rabies Day is September 28, 2016

*By the Vermont Veterinary Medical Association
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World Rabies Day is September 28th this year. This is a day set aside to raise awareness about the impact of rabies on humans and animals. This year's theme is "Rabies: Educate. Vaccinate. Eliminate." With the aim of educating, the Vermont Veterinary Medical Association (VVMA)'s One Health Committee has developed an infographic giving basic facts about rabies in Vermont. This infographic is available [here](#) or may be viewed on the VVMA's website (at <http://vtvets.org>) using a link on the home page or under the Public Health tab.

Rabies is a deadly disease; once a person or animal becomes sick with rabies, it is almost always fatal. This means the best way to combat rabies is with prevention. Fortunately, there are very effective vaccines. There are special shots for people who have contact with a rabid animal which will keep them from getting sick as long as the shots are given right after the person is exposed to rabies. There are also very effective vaccines to prevent pets and livestock from getting rabies. These vaccines are given on a regular basis: in Vermont, every one to three years depending on the type of animal.

Rabies here in the US and rabies around the world occur very differently. Worldwide rabies kills more than 55,000 people every year. Over half of these victims are under 15 years old, and most occur because of exposure to a rabid dog. In the United States, only one to two people die from rabies each year and almost never because of a rabid dog. There are more than 5,000 cases of animal rabies reported annually in the U.S. Most of these animal cases are in wildlife, but every year, 80 – 100 dogs and more than 300 cats develop rabies. In Vermont, we have rabies in the wildlife population, and these rabid wild animals can expose not only people and domestic animals but also other wildlife to rabies. In the past five years in Vermont, wildlife testing positive for rabies has included 119 raccoons, 83 skunks, 26 bats, 11 foxes, 4 woodchucks, and 3 bobcats. The scarier fact is that 8 cats, 4 cows, 1 dog, 1 horse, and 1 sheep have tested positive for rabies in Vermont during that same period. Because so many of us live near domestic and wild animals, we all need to be alert to the possibility of rabies.

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Animals with rabies don't always appear like the classic picture of a rabid animal: snarling, aggressive, and foaming at the mouth. Rabies affects the brain, so rabid animals behave bizarrely. Any time you see an animal that is not behaving normally, you should be concerned about rabies. Potentially rabid behavior includes raccoons wandering into the yard in broad daylight, any wild animal that doesn't seem afraid of people, cows or horses that stand extra calmly drooling and don't react to you or noises, in addition to the overly aggressive animals. Rabid bats may not even seem to behave oddly. It is important to teach kids to tell adults if they see any abnormal-acting animals, particularly since unafraid wildlife may be interpreted by a child as being friendly. A doctor should be consulted any time anyone has contact with a strange acting animal. Since bat bites can go undetected, any time a bat is found in a room with a baby or a sleeping person, medical attention should be sought. Also, be sure to contact your animal control authority to have them deal with the potentially rabid animal.

Rabies can be a deadly disease, but we can all help to eliminate it. We can protect our families and our neighbors by making sure our own animals are kept current on their rabies shots and by remembering to treat strange acting animals with care. For more information, visit the VVMA's website at <http://vtvets.org>.

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The Vermont Veterinary Medical Association (VVMA) is a professional organization of 357 veterinarians dedicated to compassionate animal care and quality medicine. For more information, visit www.vtvets.org or call (802) 878-6888.