

Rabies : published for distribution to cat owners : May 1991 / Cats Protection League.

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Cats Protection League.

Publication/Creation

Horsham : Cats Protection League, 1991.

Persistent URL

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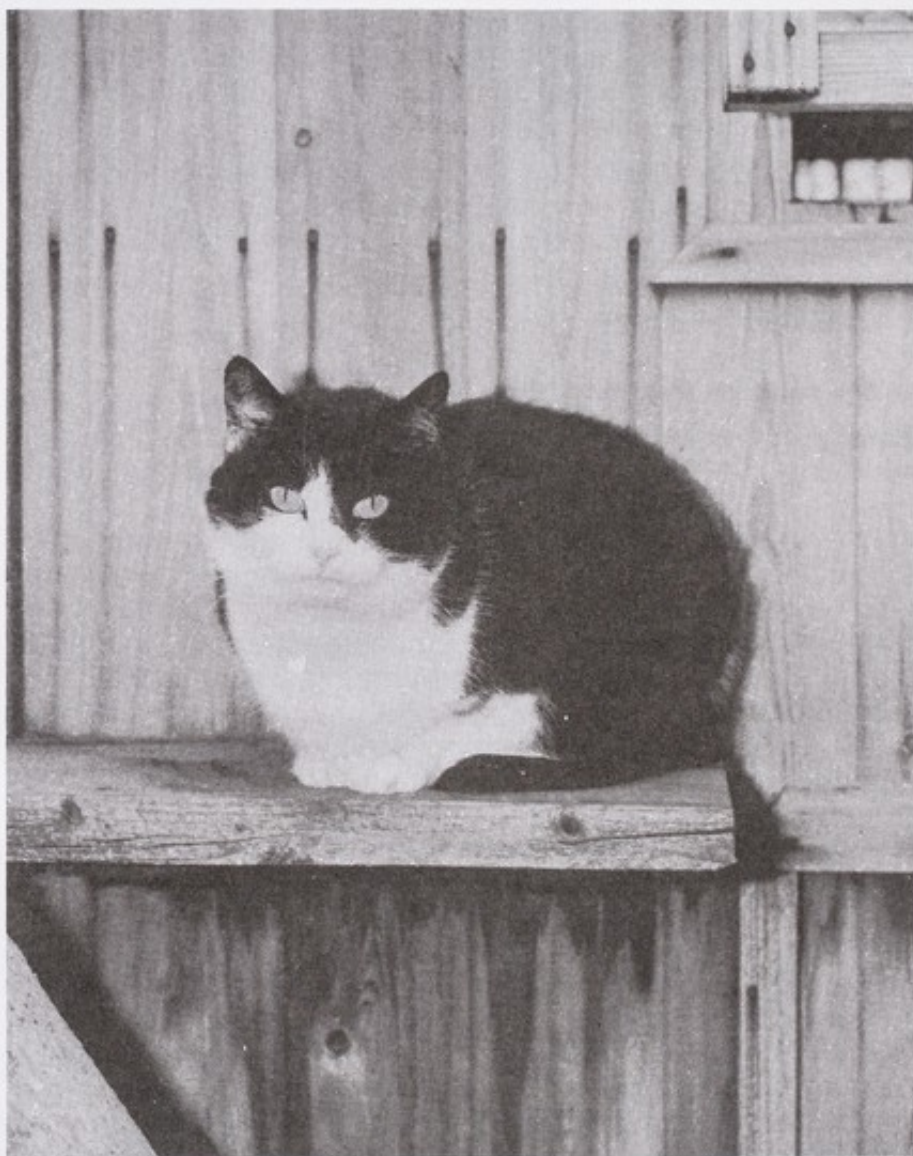
THE CATS PROTECTION LEAGUE

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RABIES

Published for distribution to cat owners



MAY 1991

REGISTERED NATIONAL CHARITY No. 203644

'WE HELP IF WE CAN'

The Cats Protection League acknowledges with gratitude the help and advice given by Mr Geoffrey West MRCVS in compiling this CPL leaflet.

What is rabies?

Rabies is a viral infection which attacks the central nervous system; it can affect virtually all mammals, including man, and has occurred in birds, including domestic poultry as well. Once the disease has developed, there is no known cure and it is almost always fatal.

How is rabies spread?

Rabies is usually caught as a result of a bite from an infected animal. The most likely domestic animals to carry the disease are dogs and cats; in the wild, it is the fox. Foxes are now common in urban areas where they encounter pet animals; a rabid fox can pass the disease through a bite to a cat or dog and thence to a human being. Infected saliva enters the wound and the virus passes along nerves to reach the brain and the spinal cord.

Unbroken skin is not permeable to the virus; but, what is not widely enough appreciated is that mucous membrane is permeable. The owner of a pet animal can become infected through being licked on the eyelids, for example.

Sometimes the virus is present in the saliva before any signs of rabies have appeared - a hazard for a person licked.

What are the signs of rabies in cats?

The clinical signs of rabies appear when the virus reaches the brain. Characteristically, the illness has three stages through which it may progress:

- The **prodromal** or preliminary stage when the cat may be noticed by its owner to be unwell. 'He seems a bit off colour', would be a typical comment. A change of temperament brought about by the virus is sometimes marked by a display of extra affection, though a normally affectionate cat may become less so. In a day or two, distinctive features begin to appear: the cat may retire to a dark place, such as under a bed; loss of voice occurs although the cat may still be able to purr.
- In the so called 'dumb' form of rabies, swallowing becomes difficult and the cat may be unable to close its mouth, the lower jaw sagging and saliva dripping from it.
- In the 'furious' form, which afflicts 75% of rabid cats, the owner may notice dilated pupils, tremors affecting the muscles and arching of the back. Excitement and aggressiveness follow with the animal making vicious and unprovoked attacks on humans and other animals and attempting to bite anything and everything. With its sharp claws and teeth which can inflict puncture-type wounds, a rabid cat can be a formidable and dangerous creature.

Occasionally an owner notices nothing wrong and finds the cat dying in the garden, paralysed as to its legs but still able to bite; sometimes death occurs without any signs of the disease having been observed.

Do these signs always indicate rabies?

Some of the symptoms mentioned above are not confined to rabies. For example, benzoic acid poisoning in cats leads to salivation, extreme aggressiveness, convulsions and death. Nervous signs are an important feature of lead poisoning, too, and may include excitement, a staggering gait, partial paralysis and convulsions.

What is the incubation period for cats?

The time elapsing between infection and the onset of symptoms varies for cats between 9 and 51 days with an average of 18 days.

The length of the illness does not usually exceed 8 days.

Can a cat be treated if he gets rabies?

Once clinical signs have been identified in a cat, there is no effective treatment and the cat will die.

Should a rabid cat be destroyed?

Rabies is incurable and death inevitable. The threat of passing on the disease to other animals or humans is great. A rabid cat should be euthanased as soon as the disease is confirmed. Rabies is a notifiable disease. This means that if one of a veterinary surgeon's clients has a cat which is showing signs suggestive of rabies, the fact must be reported to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) nearest veterinary officer. The latter can authorise a test for rabies virus to be made and in-contact animals and people traced.

Can I get my cat vaccinated against rabies?

Not in Great Britain unless the cat is in quarantine when vaccination is compulsory. So long as this country remains rabies-free, there are no plans to introduce the anti-rabies vaccination of domestic pets.

If my cat catches rabies, can it affect me?

Yes, if it should attack you and inflict a wound or if it should lick you on the eyelids etc. To a lesser degree, infection can spread through scratches or through the inhalation of saliva droplets.

If a person is bitten by an animal suspected of having rabies, **immediate** medical attention is vital. Washing the wound with soap and water, followed by rinsing with water alone, is very important. The antiseptic of choice to apply to bite wounds or scratches is Cetrimide. A doctor should be consulted as soon as possible.

In general, what are my chances of catching rabies?

Australasia and Antarctica are the only two continents free from rabies, a fortunate situation which could, of course, change at some time in the future.

If you travel outside Great Britain, even to continental Europe, you could well come into contact with rabid animals. If you are bitten by any animal whilst abroad, try to find out details of the owner, if the animal has been vaccinated and if it is healthy. Cleanse the wound and see a doctor immediately and, on return to Great Britain, report to your own doctor.

If you live in Great Britain, where rabies is not endemic, and if you never travel abroad, your chances of contracting the disease are almost negligible.

Why should I be concerned when rabies is so uncommon in this country?

Rabies has spread across continental Europe and is now established in wildlife, among foxes, roe-deer, badgers, martens and bats. So far, the English Channel has provided a natural barrier, preventing rabies from getting a foothold in Great Britain. In recent years, however, the vastly increased interchange of holidaymakers on a world wide scale, and the additional traffic with Europe which will be further increased when the Channel Tunnel is opened, mean that the possibility of the importation of animals from countries where rabies is endemic has become an even greater threat.

Constant vigilance is necessary if Great Britain is to remain rabies-free.

What are the authorities doing to keep rabies out of Great Britain?

Successive governments have introduced legislation to try to keep Great Britain free of rabies. The Rabies (Importation of Dogs, Cats and other Mammals) Order 1974, amended by 1977, 1984 and 1986 Orders accord with the advice of the World Health Organisation for rabies-free countries.

These measures include:-

1. Import Controls

Stringent import controls govern the entry of all warm-blooded mammals: licences are required and animals imported through authorised ports and airports where secure holding facilities for the animals are available.

2. Quarantine

All animals imported under licence must be placed in approved quarantine accommodation for a period of 6 months; premises must comply with recommended standards and are under veterinary control. Expenses are met by the owners of the animals being imported.

Quarantine has been demonstrated as being the best and most effective way of keeping rabies out of Great Britain.

3. Vaccination

During the period of quarantine, all dogs and cats must be vaccinated against rabies, whether previously vaccinated or not. This is primarily as an additional safeguard against the possibility of cross infection from the other quarantined animals. There is still no vaccine which, on its own, can guarantee immunity against rabies.

One of the dangers of rabies is that an animal may have become infectious before any symptoms are apparent and before vaccination can be effective. The only domestic cat to die of rabies in quarantine in this country since 1922 had been vaccinated prior to importation.

4. Severe penalties

Offences under the Rabies Order are considered serious and the penalties are severe: if the intention to evade the provisions of the order are proved, the maximum penalty is an unlimited fine and/or up to one year's imprisonment. In addition, the animal may be destroyed.

If rabies should break out, what can be done?

The Rabies (Control) Order 1974 provides far-ranging powers to deal with any outbreak of the disease. The government department responsible is the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF). Follow-up action would depend on the circumstances of the outbreak, but should an outbreak ever occur, an order might be issued restricting the movement of animals, including cats, into or out of a specific area. The compulsory vaccination of animals might be ordered with veterinary inspectors being empowered to take and destroy uncontrolled animals.

How can I help to keep Great Britain rabies-free?

Preventing rabies entering this country is paramount:-

- Do not take pets out of the country
- Do not bring animals into the country unless it is absolutely necessary, in which case, obtain an import licence.
- Pass on the information concerning rabies to others who may be unaware of the threat.
- If you suspect that an animal has been brought into the country illegally, report the matter at once to the police.
- Be vigilant, especially if you live on the coast.

KEEP BRITAIN RABIES FREE

For further information on rabies matters, please write to or telephone:

ENGLAND: MAFF
Block C, Government Buildings, (Toby Jug site)
Hook Rise South
Tolworth
Surrey, KT6 7NF
Tel: 081 330 4411

SCOTLAND: DAFS
Pentland House
47 Robb's Loan
Edinburgh, EH14 1TW
Tel: 031 556 8400

WALES: WOAD
Crown Buildings
Cathays Park
Cardiff, CF1 3NE
Tel: 0222 825111



The Cats Protection League was founded in 1927 and is the oldest Registered National Charity devoted solely to the welfare of cats and kittens. Every year it helps **thousands** of unwanted cats and kittens, supported in its work by donations, subscriptions and legacies and by many voluntary helpers running Groups and Branches throughout the country.

The objects of The Cats Protection League are:

- To rescue stray and unwanted cats and kittens, rehabilitate and rehome them where possible.
- To encourage the neutering of all cats not required for breeding.
- To inform the public on the care of cats and kittens.

If you would like further information please contact:



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