

Rabies : rabies is a killer disease! : there is an increasing risk of it entering Britain as a result of animal smuggling : your job could bring you close to the source of such smuggling. Please help to keep rabies out of Britain : bringing it in is madness / MAFF.

Contributors

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RABIES

Your work may bring you close to the sources of animal smuggling; you can play an important part in its detection and prevention. Remember that any animal, large or small, that evades quarantine could be responsible for reintroducing rabies into this country. Remember, too, that the chances of this happening will increase each year as long as the disease continues to get closer.

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RABIES

RABIES IS A KILLER DISEASE!

There is an increasing risk of it
entering Britain as a result of animal
smuggling.

Your job could bring you close to the
source of such smuggling.
Please help to keep
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BRINGING IT IN IS
MADNESS





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HOW IS BRITAIN THREATENED?

Apart from two isolated incidents in 1969 and 1970, Britain has been free from rabies since 1922. However, the disease is widespread in much of the rest of the world. Perhaps the greatest threat of rabies is from the continent of Europe through the vast interchange of holidaymakers and the high volume of traffic across the channel. In France, Germany, some other Western European countries and in Eastern Europe rabies is widespread and increasing, particularly in wildlife. This is despite an extensive eradication programme.

WHAT IS RABIES?

Rabies is a viral infection to which man and all warm-blooded animals are susceptible. It attacks the central nervous system, causing paralysis and convulsions, and in man is invariably fatal. Those people unfortunate enough to contract it usually do so from the bite of a pet that has itself been infected by a wild or stray animal.

A horrifying feature of human rabies is the uncertainty of the incubation period, which can vary from a few days to many months. Although a person exposed to rabies may be given a course of preventive injections, the victim has to face a period, perhaps a very long one, of great distress before it is known whether or not the disease will develop.

In animals the first sign of rabies is usually a change in behaviour. A friendly pet may become aggressive or hide in a corner; a wild animal may appear abnormally tame. Tremors may accompany paralysis of the limbs, or the animal may run long distances, greatly excited, biting at anything in its path. One of the dangers of rabies is that the animal may have become infectious some days before any symptoms are apparent.

THE VALUE OF QUARANTINE REGULATIONS

As an island, Britain has been able to keep this horrifying disease out with strict import controls on dogs, cats and most other mammals. All imported animals subject to these controls must have an import licence and be transported by an authorised carrying agent to an approved quarantine premises for six calendar months.

An outbreak of rabies would be costly not only in financial terms, but also the quality of our life would suffer, both in the city and in the countryside. We would all be afraid of coming into contact with animals.

Quarantine should continue to keep rabies out of Britain, but this safeguard is seriously threatened by the smuggling of animals. There have been a great number of cases of attempted smuggling detected each year. Whether the offenders act from genuine ignorance of the regulations – as nearly all of them claim to – or in deliberate breach of them, they put the whole community at risk. The Rabies Importation of Dogs, Cats and Other Mammals Order 1974 (As Amended) recognises the risk, and the penalties for animal smuggling are severe: an unlimited fine and up to a year's imprisonment.

KEEPING RABIES OUT

The above powers have been taken to deter would-be offenders, but as Britain has been rabies free for so long there is a danger that people may still underestimate how serious its reintroduction would be. Should the disease become endemic, any animal bite or scratch, however slight, would be cause for fear. Unless these dangers are widely understood, some travellers may continue trying to smuggle animals by hiding them in their luggage or vehicles. Others may take their pets with them on sailing or caravan trips, not realising that they too must comply with the regulations: any animal taken abroad, however short its stay, is at risk.

