

Rabies – A horrifying disease affecting animals as well as humans

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Rabies is a dreadful disease which affects not only animals but humans also. It is considered to be zoonotic disease because it can be transmitted from animals to humans. This infectious viral disease affects nervous system and causes inflammation in the brain. Once the clinical signs appear in the affected animal or individual, the disease is almost always fatal. There is no specific treatment for rabies and hence prevention is the only way to keep the disease away. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to create awareness about rabies so that maximum population can be prevented from this fatal disease.

Rabies is a disease found throughout the world, but more than 95% of human deaths occur in Asia and Africa. Rabies affects domestic and wild animals and is spread to people through bites or scratches, usually via saliva. However, in upto 99% of human cases, the rabies virus is transmitted by rabid dogs. Though, it is also transmitted by the bite of mongoose, vampire bats and wolves etc. Once an individual is bitten, the virus spreads through its nerves to the brain. It is important to note that bites or scratches on the head and neck are thought to speed up the progression of disease because of the location of the

trauma.

Signs of rabies : Animals suffering from this disease usually exhibit typical signs of nervous system disturbance. The most reliable signs are acute behavioral changes and unexplained progressive paralysis. Changed vocal sounds and uncharacteristic aggressiveness may develop (a normally docile animal may suddenly become vicious). There are generally two forms of rabies *i.e.* furious form and paralytic form.

Furious Form : The animal becomes irritable and may aggressively use its teeth, claws, horns, or hooves. Dog with this form of rabies frequently roam extensively, attacking other animals/people and any moving object. They commonly swallow foreign objects e.g. straw, sticks and stones. As the disease progresses, muscular in coordination and seizures are common.

Paralytic Form : It is manifested by paralysis of the throat muscles with profuse salivation and the inability to swallow. Due to this fear of water (hydrophobia) occurs. Owners sometime examine the mouth of dogs/livestock searching for a foreign body, thereby exposing themselves to rabies. The paralysis progresses rapidly to all parts of the body, coma develops and death follows in a few hours.



Fig. 1 : Rabies transmission through infected saliva(courtesy; internet)



Fig. 2 : Vaccination of a pup

In humans also signs are similar and are due to involvement of nervous system. Infected people who develop rabies will be hyperactive and excitable, display erratic behaviour, insomnia, anxiety, confusion, agitation, hallucinations, excess salivation, problems in swallowing, fear of water, paralysis and death.

This is to emphasize that there is no treatment of this disease but this is certainly be preventable. Following are some the important measures which can be taken to prevent you as well as your animals from this disease :

- Vaccinate your dogs against rabies and properly follow the vaccination schedule given by your veterinarian. Anti-Rabies vaccination schedule for pets (puppy) is; first dose at 3 months of age, and thereafter repeat annually.
- Avoid exposure of your pet with the stray dogs which can be source of infection.
- Post-bite vaccination (post exposure) of pets or

livestock, if bitten by stray dogs/rabid animal. Schedule for post-bite vaccination against rabies is on 0 (day of exposure), 3, 7, 14, 28 and 90 days (optional). It is of utmost importance to follow the vaccination schedule judiciously.

- Avoid contact with wild animals such as mongoose, vampire bats etc.
- Policies should be made to control stray dogs' population.
- Create awareness about this disease among masses.
- Persons handling infected material or animal should be prophylactically vaccinated.
- In case of a bite by a dog, wound of affected person/animal should be thoroughly washed with soap (having higher caustic content) and plenty of water (minimum of 15 minutes washing under running tap). Immediate wound cleansing with soap and water after contact with a suspected rabid animal can be life-saving. Apply some antiseptic (Iodine solution) on the wound and it should not be stitched or cauterized, if possible.
- In case of a dog bite, don't ignore and contact your doctor immediately on the same day. It is necessary to go for post bite vaccination and follow its schedule rigorously.

Although rabies is a very dangerous disease which cannot be cured but with the help of awareness and proper vaccination, it can easily be prevented. It is expected that this article will spread awareness amongst masses and help in prevention of this disease in animals as well as humans.

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