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## MEMORANDUM

TO: Local Health Departments Communicable Disease Personnel,  
Regional Offices of Illinois Department of Public Health, Hospital  
Emergency Departments

FROM: Connie Austin, D.V.M., M.P.H., Ph.D.  
State Public Health Veterinarian

DATE: June 7, 2011

SUBJECT: **Decisions about Rabies Post-exposure Prophylaxis After Bites  
from Dogs and Cats**

We are entering the warmer weather season when bites from dogs and cats become more common in the state. Therefore, we want to provide information that may be helpful to emergency departments on rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) recommendations in Illinois patients bitten by dogs and cats. Hopefully, this will assist in reducing unnecessary rabies PEP administration.

The last rabid dog in Illinois was identified in 1994 and the last rabid cat in 1996. Therefore, dogs and cats in Illinois present a very low-risk for rabies in the state since it has been over 10 years since the last rabid dog or cat was identified. In addition, many dogs and cats are vaccinated for rabies protecting them against infection with rabies virus.

Therefore, with the current rabies situation in Illinois, if a patient presents with a provoked dog or cat bite from a healthy animal bitten in Illinois there is no need for rabies PEP for that patient regardless of the rabies vaccination status of the dog or cat. A provoked bite is a bite that occurs in a situation in which a dog or cat might be expected to bite. Examples include approaching or reaching down to pet an unfamiliar dog or cat, jogging or biking by a dog, feeding a dog or cat, or going onto property a dog is protecting. The large majority of animals with rabies virus in the saliva will have signs of rabies because the virus is already present in the brain.

In Illinois, bites from dogs and cats that may result in the need for a recommendation for rabies PEP would include bites from a dog or cat with signs of rabies or when there is an unprovoked bite from a dog or cat and the animal

cannot be tested negative for rabies. An example of an unprovoked bite is when a person is standing in a park and a dog or cat comes up and bites the person for no apparent reason. In addition, rabies PEP may be recommended when bites from dogs or cats occur in other states or countries upon consultation with public health authorities. Another situation that may result in the need for rabies treatment is if a low-risk dog or cat dies during the 10 day confinement period following the bite and is not submitted for rabies testing.

Any time a patient has been bitten by a domestic animal, a description of the biting animal, the geographic location where the bite occurred and the situation in which the bite occurred should be obtained. In addition, local animal control should be notified. Local animal control personnel will attempt to identify the animal, obtain a rabies vaccination history and ensure that the animal is confined for a 10-day period to validate that the low-risk animal remains healthy following the bite.

Potential human rabies exposures from domestic animals are reportable to the local health department if rabies PEP is administered or recommended. The local health department (LHD) should be notified in situations in which rabies PEP is being considered or is being administered. The LHDs are familiar with the ACIP guidelines for rabies PEP administration and with animal rabies surveillance in their jurisdiction and can be a valuable resource when decisions need to be made about rabies PEP.

We request that local health departments share this information with their local animal control counterparts.