Rabbies Vaccinations to Become Mandatory

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

Posted on : December 1, 2011 at 6:00 am

Olympia, WA - New Year, new law. Pet dogs, cats, and ferrets in the state must be current on their rabies vaccination starting January 1, 2012. This new rule aims to reduce the number of rabies exposures in Washington.Rabies is one of the oldest and most deadly diseases. Every year in Washington, several hundred people have to get the series of rabies shots because of possible exposure to the rabies virus. Vaccinating pets prevents them from getting rabies and helps protect you and your family, too.The Department of Health Zoonotic Disease program (www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/ZOO.HTM) says the new rule requires owners of dogs, cats, and ferrets to have their pets vaccinated against rabies. Many cities and counties require rabies vaccinations for some pets, but vaccinations have never been required by the state. Vaccinating pets is one of the most effective ways of preventing rabies. People should talk to their veterinarian about vaccinations and rabies prevention.

In Washington, bats are the primary source of rabies. Each year many bats test positive for rabies across the state. Pet encounters with sick bats are one of the primary ways pets are exposed to rabies, and their owners can be exposed when they take the bats away from their pets. Cats are the most commonly affected domestic animal nationwide, with twice as many cats testing positive for rabies as dogs.Coming into contact with an infected bat could be life-threatening without post-exposure rabies vaccination. People should never handle a bat; it may be infected with rabies. If you’re exposed to rabies you must get treatment immediately. Once symptoms develop it’s too late. The most recent human rabies cases in the state were in 1995 and 1997, and the last domestic animal in Washington to test positive was a cat in 2002.There was a time early in our state’s history when rabies was rampant in King and Pierce counties, with numerous animals and people contracting the disease. Since rabies vaccinations began many years ago there’s been a dramatic decrease in animal rabies cases.In many countries worldwide, rabies occurs widely in domestic animals, especially dogs. Animals imported from these countries are a potential risk of exposure to other pets and people. State and federal rules are in place to ensure that imported animals have proper vaccinations and medical records.The Department of Health website (www.doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, find us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter.