



VETERINARY IRELAND PRESS RELEASES

World Rabies Day 2008: Awareness is the Best Defense against Rabies

The world is again joining together on September 28th to raise awareness and understanding about the importance of rabies prevention. Led by the Alliance for Rabies Control and supported by numerous human and animal health organizations worldwide, World Rabies Day is a unique campaign that brings together hundreds of thousands of people across the world to reinforce the message that rabies is a preventable disease, yet kills 55,000 people needlessly each year, half of which are children under the age of 15.

Veterinary Ireland's Companion Animal Society (VICAS) – the representative body for companion animal (pet) vets in Ireland - is supporting this initiative.

“Thankfully, we don't have rabies in Ireland and all our efforts should continue to be directed towards maintaining this position”, according to VICAS chairperson and veterinarian Alan Rossiter. “The main risk of rabies getting into Ireland would appear to be illegal importation of pet dogs and cats from mainland Europe on ferries. We have stringent regulations regarding importation of such animals that are effective and we believe there should be no change to these regulations that have kept us rabies free up to now”, continues Mr. Rossiter. “Our island status combined with the fact that our neighboring island Britain is also rabies free affords us a great comfort that we all naturally take for granted. A nip from a dog here, whilst traumatic, does not lead to the same grave concerns that would arise in countries where rabies occurs. Let's all do what is required to keep it this way.”

Rabies, the oldest and deadliest disease known to mankind, is a viral disease that can be transmitted to animals and humans. The disease is transmitted mainly by bite, but exposure may also occur through contamination of broken skin or mucous membranes with saliva from an infected animal. Once neurological symptoms of the disease develop, rabies is always fatal to both animals and humans. The good news is that rabies is easily preventable. “Vaccination prior to possible exposure is a crucial part of health management of domestic animals, and is the single most important factor in rabies prevention”, continues Mr. Rossiter. “Many countries in mainland Europe require mandatory rabies vaccination for pet dogs and cats. Whilst thankfully we don't need to do this here there is a ‘Pet Passport’ system in place to allow pet dogs and cats to travel to Europe on holidays with their owners and back again without going through quarantine. To get a pet passport a pet has to be microchipped, vaccinated against rabies and undergo a blood test to ensure the vaccine has worked. This can all be done by your local pet vet and the cost will be no more than a few weeks in boarding kennels”.

“When traveling in countries where rabies exists prevention of infection starts by ensuring one avoids stray animals and wildlife and in particular ensuring children know how important it is to stay away from animals

but also inform you if they have been nipped or even scratched. If you are bitten, wash bite wounds with soap and water and seek medical attention immediately. If your pet is bitten, consult a vet immediately. Prompt and appropriate treatment after being bitten and before the disease develops can stop rabies infection and/or prevent the disease in humans and animals and save the life of the person or animal that has been bitten. ”, Mr.Rossiter concluded.