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Cats Are No Rabies Threat

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Learn the Facts About Cats and Rabies

Did you know that we are safer than ever from rabies in the United States? Yet some

people see a community cat wandering in her outdoor home and worry that she has rabies. It's an unfounded fear that could end up endangering cats' lives.

At Alley Cat Allies, we strive to alleviate fears about rabies through education and understanding. As World Rabies Day approaches on September 28, we are getting an early start debunking some of the most common misconceptions about this notorious virus and how it relates to cats.

These are the facts: Rabies prevention is a public health victory. It is extremely rare that cats contract it, let alone spread it.

Here are answers to some of your concerns about rabies and cats:

How common is rabies and is it a death sentence if you contract it?

Thankfully, the rabies virus is no longer a major threat in the United States. Only 34 cases of rabies in humans have been reported in the U.S. since 2003, [according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#).

Today's treatment for humans exposed to rabies is proven to be nearly **100 percent effective**. The CDC states that human fatalities from rabies occur because the victims were unaware of their exposure and did not seek medical attention. Today, rabies shots are given in the arm, just like your annual flu shot.

There are feral cats in my neighborhood. Should I worry about whether they have rabies, and the possibility that they could give the virus to my pets?

You have nothing to fear from community cats. [They are not a public health threat in any way](#). Sadly, rabies concerns are often brought up when a community is deciding on policies for cats, which often lead to the senseless deaths of countless healthy animals.

When misguided residents buy into rabies hysteria with no supporting facts, animal control rounds up community cat colonies to alleviate concerns. These cats are taken to shelters, [where nearly all of them will be killed](#) because they are not socialized to humans and therefore unadoptable. Also, shelters lack the space and resources to house them.

The next time you, your neighbors, or your community's decision makers are worried about rabies in community cats, remember these facts:

- Rabies in cats is extremely rare. [According to the CDC](#), domestic animals, including

pets, accounted for only 7.6 percent of reported rabies cases in the U.S. in 2015, the last year for which statistics were available. There has not been a single confirmed case of cat-to-human rabies in the U.S. in the past 40 years. In fact, only two human rabies cases have been attributed to cats since 1960.

- Community cats are generally as healthy as pet cats and have equally low rates of disease. Though some have been falsely accused of spreading diseases from rabies to toxoplasmosis, [science disagrees](#). Community cat caregivers, who are in constant contact with the cats and would be the first to suffer any ill effects, have shown no increased rate of disease.
- Cat behavior and instincts keep them from contracting rabies. Cats are defensive by nature, so they run from most wildlife. The animals that cats hunt for food—like squirrels, chipmunks, and mice—rarely have rabies.
- Community cats are not socialized to people, which means they usually run and hide from humans.

Which animals are more likely to contract and spread rabies?

Wild animals are the only remaining risks in the U.S. Rabies vaccination programs for domestic animals like cats, dogs, and livestock have become the norm around the nation, which eliminated the threat from their populations.

According to [the CDC website](#), wild animals accounted for 92.4 percent of reported rabies cases in 2015. Among the most commonly infected animals were bats, raccoons, skunks, and foxes.

What can I do to help make sure the cats in my neighborhood are rabies-free?

Practice Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR), the process of humanely trapping community cats, bringing them to a veterinary clinic to be spayed or neutered and vaccinated, and then returning them to their outdoor homes. You can also support local organizations and caregivers who do TNR.

One rabies vaccine is known to protect a cat for years, so caregivers do not need to trap the cats again to get them re-vaccinated. TNR is a win-win approach that protects cats and puts community members at ease.

Remember this: Rabies fears are often used to justify catch and kill approaches, which involve permanently removing community cats from an area. However, removing animals

from an area only triggers [a scientifically-proven phenomenon called the vacuum effect](#):
New cats from neighboring territories simply move into the cleared space to take advantage of resources, like food, and breed back to capacity.

You should also remember to vaccinate your pet cats against rabies!

We must work together to share the facts. This World Rabies Day, educate your friends and neighbors on the facts about cats and rabies. Only through awareness can we fight dangerous misconceptions about cats and save their lives.

For more information, visit alleycat.org/Rabies.

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