



Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services

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Unvaccinated dog tests positive for rabies

An unvaccinated Trinity County dog that bit at least one person tested positive Thursday for rabies.

The dog's owner had taken the animal to Humboldt County for testing. The sample was processed at the Department of Health and Human Service's Public Health laboratory in Eureka.

The dog's owner, the veterinarian who provided the sample, the Humboldt County Health Officer and the California Department of Public Health were all immediately notified of the test results.

Three adults and two children, all Trinity County residents, came into contact with the dog and are undergoing a series of injections to prevent rabies infection. No one in Humboldt County is believed to have been exposed.

"Rabies in domestic animals is extremely rare in California," said Health Officer Ann Lindsay. "In Humboldt County, we haven't had a rabid dog in more than 20 years."

Lindsay noted that the canine-variant strain rabies is believed to have been eradicated in the U.S. While final test results will not be available for four to six weeks, it is believed the Trinity County dog was infected with a skunk variant, which is carried by both skunks and foxes.

"The elimination of canine-variant rabies in the U.S. is one of the major public health success stories of the past 50 years," said Public Health Branch Director Susan Buckley. "Widespread vaccination of household pets stopped canine-to-canine transmission. But dogs can still get rabies from wildlife—such as skunks, foxes, raccoons and bats—and they can still infect humans."

Vaccination remains incredibly important, Lindsay said.

“Rabies is endemic among wildlife in Humboldt County, and vaccinating your dog is required by law,” she said. “You’re not just protecting your pet. You’re also protecting your family, your neighbors and anyone else who may come into contact with your animal.”

A viral disease of the central nervous system, rabies is one of the oldest and most feared diseases reported in medical literature. Once symptoms appear, there is no known treatment that can cure the disease.

According to the World Health Organization, rabies kills an estimated 55,000 people globally each year. Very few humans have been known to survive the infection.

A follow-up investigation to identify additional exposures, if any, is being conducted by Trinity County officials with the assistance of the Humboldt County Public Health Branch.

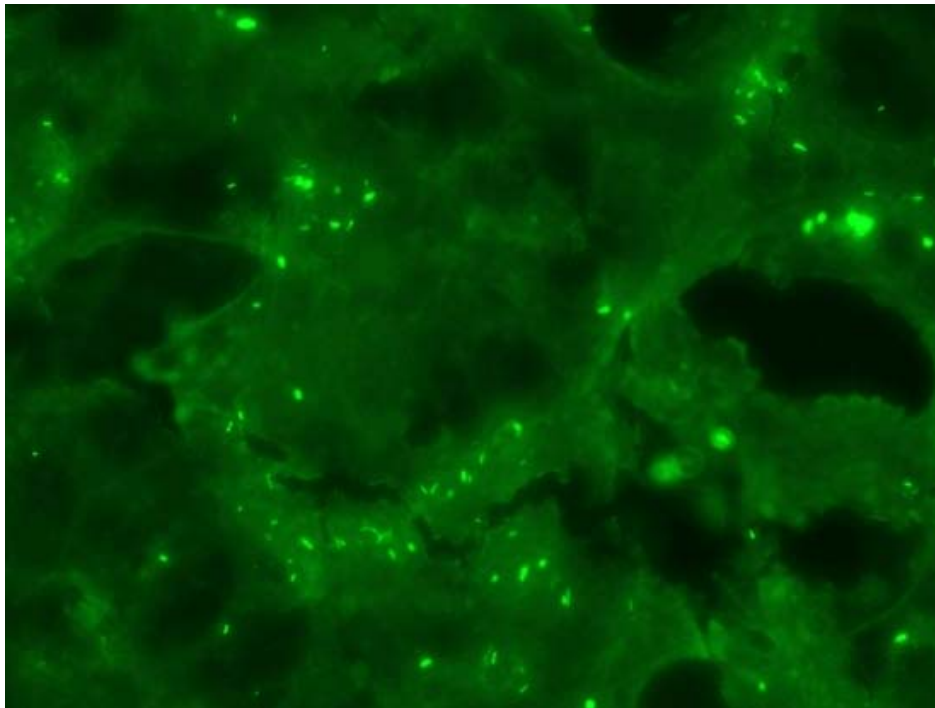


Photo credit: Los Angeles County Public Health Laboratory, 2007

Rabies-positive brain sample. Photo is taken through a fluorescent microscope. The brain sample from the rabid animal was prepared on glass slides, incubated with fluorescent antibodies that attach to the virus, and then viewed through the microscope. The rabies virus is seen as small fluorescent clusters throughout the sample.

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