The Worcester County Rabies Experience

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Outline
- Background
- Upsurge of rabies cases in the County
- Rising public health concerns
- Strategies/Outreach
- Rabies Advisory Committee
- Short-Term Results
- Long-Term Goals
Worcester County Background

- Eastern-most county in Maryland
- Mostly rural with the exception of Ocean City and three small incorporated towns
  - County contains Pocomoke River State Park, Assateague National Seashore, State Forest Lands
- 40 miles long by 30 miles wide
- Year round population of 50,000 swells to 350,000 with vacationers in the summer
- Bordered by Delaware to the north, Virginia to the south, Wicomico and Somerset counties to the west.
  - Creates the need for multi-jurisdiction collaboration
Environmental Health

- Small staff (2) responsible for animal bite and rabies exposure investigations, along with other duties such as food, pools, body piercing, etc.
  - Responsibilities include exposure screening, specimen collection and submission to lab, quarantines/isolation of pets, outreach, and related follow-up
- Local Animal Control assists when necessary with investigations, impounds, and enforcement
  - Worcester County - 3 Officers
  - Ocean City - 2 Officers
- Staff on call 24/7

Historic Rabies Data

- Epidemic of raccoon rabies on the east coast did not reach the County until 1993
- County average was 60 rabies investigations with 10-15 confirmed positives per year before 2008, as well as approximately 200 domestic animal bite investigations per year
Rapid Increase in Cases

- Beginning in August of 2008 case investigations began increasing rapidly
- Numerous pet contacts and some direct to human exposures
- January through July - 8 confirmed positives total; in August and September alone, 10 additional positives
Rapid Increase in Cases cont.

- Not all suspect rabid animals were able to be tested, staff began keeping a list of suspect cases
- Increase in man-hours devoted to the Rabies program, required a shift of priorities
- The number of investigations continued to increase
  - 2008-85
  - 2009-150
  - 2010-175
Confirmed and Suspect Rabid Animals

Rising Public Health Concerns

- Poor vaccination rates of County owned pets resulting in high numbers being euthanized/6 month isolation
  - 2009 data from investigations showed that only 44% of pets had current vaccinations
    - 42% of dogs were unvaccinated/expired
    - 68% of cats were unvaccinated/expired
- Over the course of eight months there were 3 rabid cats
- Feral and semi-feral cat colonies were being maintained by cat rescuers in the County
- Recognized need for improved communication between HD and first responders
- Lack of general public and partner agency knowledge about rabies and prevention measures
Pet Impacts from Rabies Exposures

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<td>Dogs</td>
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- Euthanized
- 6 mo. Isolation
- 45 day quarantine

Strategies to Address Rising Public Health Concerns

- Community Awareness and Support
- Vaccination
- Collaboration/Education
- Outreach
  - Specific
  - General
Community Awareness and Commissioner Support

- April 6, 2010 Presentation to Worcester County Commissioners
  - Current status of rabies
  - Six areas for action
  - Input and approval to proceed

Call to Action

- Increase public awareness and education.
- Review existing animal control ordinance.
- Enhance investigation and enforcement by animal control.
- Develop a plan for control of feral and semi-feral cat populations.
- Additional animal vaccination clinics.
- Secure needed financial and manpower resources.
- Creation of Worcester County Rabies Advisory Committee.
Rabies in the News

- “Commissioners to study recommendations regarding rabies control,” Ocean City Today, Aug. 6, 2010.
- Featured multiple times in County Commissioners' column in Worcester County Times.
- Public health announcements on radio and WBOC, WMDT.

Rabies Advisory Committee

- Commissioners authorized the formation of the committee
  - Members included Health Department, Animal Control, Sheriff’s Office, Veterinarians, Dr. Feldman, local cat rescue groups, and the County Attorney and PIO
- Met from April-July 2010 to formulate recommendations in the action areas
- Explored oral rabies baiting vaccination program (Anne Arundel County)
- Presented recommendations to the Commissioners in August 2010
Rabies Vaccinations

- Investigations were not closed until all pets on a property were currently vaccinated
  - Non-compliant cases were forwarded to the local Animal Control for citations
- Additional low-cost rabies vaccination clinics were scheduled in more areas
- Magnets designed to be handed out at clinics as visual rabies vaccination reminders
Multi-Agency Collaboration

- Met with various agencies to discuss rabies exposure protocols
  - Local Animal Control, Law Enforcement/Dispatchers, National & State Park Staff, Campgrounds
- Developed an algorithm to help partners distinguish between nuisance calls and possible rabies exposures
- Rabies Resource Manuals were distributed to Veterinarians
  - Provided education for veterinary staff about rabies exposures and prevention measures
  - Rabies laws and regulations
  - Provided brochures and posters
Outreach

Specific
- Rabies advisories were distributed in the areas surrounding confirmed and suspect rabies cases
- In one case, reverse 911 was utilized for an investigation of a confirmed rabid stray cat

General
- Press releases were distributed to the media to advise the public of rabid animals and methods for risk reduction
- Weekly lists of confirmed positive and suspect rabid animal locations were made available to the public and faxed to veterinarians
- Prevention Office distributed educational material to libraries and at community events
- Health Department and Animal Control's websites were revised to include:
  - Rabies information and reporting procedures
  - The laws requiring rabies vaccination
  - Rabies vaccination clinic advertisements
Short-Term Results

- Increased vaccination enforcement
  - Failure to vaccinate cases turned over to Animal Control
  - Dogs currently vaccinated increased to 71% in 2010; Cats currently vaccinated only increased to 35% in 2010
- County Commissioners authorized more rabies vaccination clinics
  - 4/yr historically; 7 held in 2010: 12 planned for 2011
- Better communication established with Law Enforcement/Animal Control partners providing enhanced investigation and faster response times for the public, preventing pet exposures
- Increased reporting of exposures by veterinarians, especially wounds of unknown origin

Long-Term Goals

- Enhance enforcement of current vaccination/licensing laws in order to achieve higher percentages of currently vaccinated pets, especially cats
- Continue additional low cost vaccination clinics
- Address feral cat colonies
  - Greater awareness of risks of feral cat colonies
  - Better education for cat rescuers on rabies risks
- Better education of veterinary clients on the importance of keeping current rabies vaccinations
Questions?