

Occupational Health Group is a service offered to the business community of North Alabama by Decatur General Hospital and Huntsville Hospital Systems

Rabies Awareness

by Joseph L. Rea, M.D., M.P.H.



“Man bites dog” would certainly make an interesting headline. However, the opposite is the more likely and important occurrence.

Whether the animal is wild or domestic, the chief concern is the transmission of rabies, a fatal disease if not recognized and treated.

In the summer, we spend more time in activities such as walking, hiking, and camping. This increased exposure to the outdoors brings with it an increased risk of being bitten by an animal with rabies.

There are two ways rabies can appear in an animal. One is called “furious rabies,” in which the animal first becomes agitated, then snaps and lashes out before succumbing to eventual paralysis and death. The other more common form is called “dumb rabies.” In this form, symptoms are only weakness and paralysis before the death of the animal. Abnormal behavior in affected animals can also occur. For example, a wild animal may not show appropriate fear around humans, or nocturnal creatures, such as bats, may come out in the daytime.

The rabies virus is found on all continents of the world except Antarctica. Worldwide, rabid wild dogs are the main carriers. The infected animal injects rabies-laden saliva into its victim through a bite. The rabies virus enters the bite wound and then travels up nerves into the brain. Vital brain centers are damaged, leading to muscle spasm, delirium, convulsions, paralysis, and then coma and death.

Human rabies is rare in this country. This is because of our medical surveillance system, prevention efforts, and available treatment methods. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported ten cases over an eight-year period, roughly one case per year. Some occupational groups, outdoor enthusiasts, and world travelers may be most at risk for getting the disease.

Rabies in humans can be prevented by reducing exposure to rabid animals. The public should avoid handling or feeding wild mammals. Pets should be vaccinated. Livestock in contact with humans, such as in petting zoos or at fairs, also can be vaccinated. Imported animals should be regulated and rabies vaccination required. Vaccination of free-ranging wildlife is valuable but difficult. Translocation of infected wildlife has sometimes spread rabies, so wildlife rehabilitation efforts must exercise caution not to introduce infected animals into new locales.

So far in 2004, the Occupational Health Group (OHG) clinics have seen ten patients with animal bites. None of these cases, fortunately, has involved rabies. Typically, the bite victims were working as utility meter readers, delivery personnel, or in animal control.

See **Rabies** on page 2

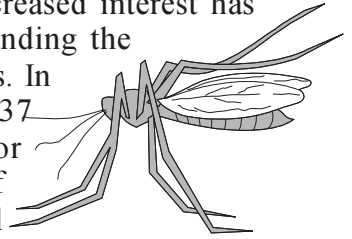
Fight The Bite!

A CDC Summary Update on West Nile Virus for 2004

by Shanon D. Smith, M.D., M.P.H.

• What Is West Nile Virus?

West Nile virus (WNV) is a potentially serious illness. In the past few years, increased interest has revolved around understanding the virus and the disease process. In 2003, Alabama reported 37 cases to the Centers for Disease Control with 25 of these involving neurological invasion and 3 that resulted in death. Experts believe WNV is established as a seasonal epidemic in North America that flares up in the summer and continues into the fall. Commonly, mosquitoes become WNV carriers after being infected when they feed on sick birds, infected with the virus. Then, infected mosquitoes spread the virus by biting humans.



• What Are the Symptoms of WNV?

WNV affects the central nervous system. About one in 150 people infected with WNV will develop severe illness demonstrated as: high fever, headache, disorientation, coma, muscle weakness, vision loss, numbness and paralysis. These symptoms may last several weeks, and neurological effects may be permanent. But up to 20 percent of the people who become infected will display milder symptoms of fever, headache, and body aches, nausea, vomiting, and sometimes swollen lymph glands or a skin rash. In general, approximately 80 percent of people who are infected with WNV will not show any symptoms at all.

• How Soon Do Infected People Get Sick?

People typically develop symptoms between 3 and 14 days after they are bitten by the infected mosquito.

• How Is WNV Infection Treated?

There is no specific treatment for WNV infection. In cases with milder symptoms, people experience symptoms such as fever and aches that pass on their own. In more severe cases, people usually need to go to the hospital where they can receive supportive treatment including intravenous fluids, help with breathing and nursing care.

• What Can I Do to Prevent WNV?

- The easiest and best way to avoid WNV is to *prevent* mosquito bites.

See **Bite** on page 2

OHG Directory

Administration	256/922-6675
Marketing and Business Development	256/922-6675
Billing Department	256/922-6670
OHG - Decatur	256/353-4325
OHG - Huntsville	256/265-7000
OHG - Madison	256/774-7300
Wellness Services	256/922-6699

www.OHGonline.org

A Message From the Director

OHG's Medical Director, Dr. William Walley, announced his retirement from his position as Occupational Health Group Medical Director, effective July 3, 2004. It is my honor to congratulate him and wish him well.

As you know, Dr. Walley has been an integral part of Occupational Medicine in North Alabama, leading our clinical team for the past 14 years. After many years in the private and corporate practice of Occupational Medicine, Dr. Walley joined Huntsville Hospital System in 1990 as Medical Director of Occupational Health Services. Under his leadership, OHS grew to provide occupational clinical services to more than 4000 clients in North Alabama. Since 1999, when OHS joined HealthGroup of Alabama to become Occupational Health Group, Dr. Walley has continued to serve as Medical Director.

Dr. Walley is Board certified in Occupational and Environmental Medicine. He is a member of the

Madison County Medical Society, Medical Association of Alabama, American Medical Association, and the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine. He has served in progressive positions of leadership within the Alabama Occupational Medicine Association, including Vice President, President, and member of the Board of Directors.

Dr. Walley has been instrumental in the development of occupational medicine service programs in North Alabama. Under his leadership, Occupational Health Group has become a recognized leader in occupational medicine services on a state and regional basis.

It has been a pleasure to work with a gentleman of his caliber and expertise. I know that you will want to join me in wishing him good health and prosperity as he enters this new phase of his life.

John Reynolds
Director

Bite _____ from page 1

- When you are outdoors, use insect repellents containing DEET (N, N-diethyl-metotoluamide).
- Many mosquitoes are most active at dusk and dawn. Be sure to use insect repellent and wear long sleeves and pants at these times or consider staying indoors during these hours. Light-colored clothing can help you see mosquitoes that land on you.
- Make sure you have good screens on your windows and doors to keep mosquitoes out.
- Get rid of mosquito breeding sites by emptying standing water from flower pots, buckets and barrels. Change the water in pet dishes and replace the water in bird baths weekly. Drill holes in tire swings so water drains out. Keep children's wading pools empty and on their sides when they aren't being used.



• What Else Should I Know?

You can check out the tracking of the virus by the CDC on a nationwide map on <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/>. If you find a dead bird, don't handle the body with your bare hands. Contact your local health department.

Holiday Closings

All OHG clinics will be closed in observance of the following holidays:

Independence Day

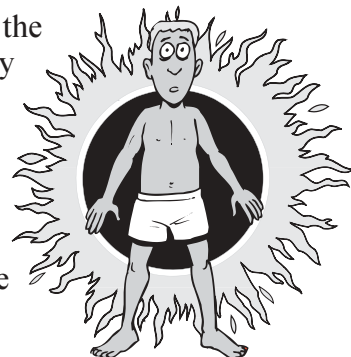
Monday, July 5, 2004

Labor Day

Monday, September 6, 2004

The Heat is On...

July in Alabama usually signals the onset of HOT and humid sunny weather. Summer for outdoor workers means increased risk for heat stress and its resultant medical problems. Avoidance of these problems comes from awareness and by taking some simple preventive steps.....



To protect your employees and/or yourself from summer's heat risks, you may read this complete article from the OHG Newsroom Archives on our website. Go to www.OHGonline.org and click on "Newsroom", scroll down and click on "Newsroom Archives" then look for "Heat Stress".

Rabies _____ from page 1

If exposed through a bite or scratch, thorough cleaning of the wound with soap and water is an important first step. Then the decision of whether or not to vaccinate must be made. OHG reports the case to the Madison County Health Department, which has a prompt and effective surveillance system in place. The department contacts the animal's owner and arrangements are made for the animal to be observed. The animal is confined and observed by a veterinarian for ten days. If the animal stays healthy, then it is assumed that it is not infected with rabies. If the animal shows suspicious signs of disease or if it is wild, the animal is customarily killed and the brain analyzed for rabies. If the animal is infected, the human victim is given injections of antibody to the rabies virus along with a series of vaccinations.

Left untreated, rabies is virtually always fatal. Animal bites should immediately be reported to a health care provider who can evaluate the need for rabies treatment. This prompt attention, along with exercising normal caution to avoid bites and scratches of wild or unvaccinated domestic animals, can reduce risk to the uncommon but grave presence of rabies and allow us to enjoy a safer summer.

OHG

DECATUR

1615 Kathy Lane, SW
Decatur, AL 35603
256/353-4325

HUNTSVILLE

1963 Memorial Parkway
Huntsville, AL 35801
256/265-7000

MADISON

9238 Madison Blvd., #200
Madison, AL 35758
256/774-7300

WELLNESS SERVICES

6767 Old Madison Pike #400
Huntsville, AL 35806
256/922-6699