

“Dumb Bats, Mad Cats, And Down Goats: A study of Rabies in Georgia”

From antiquity to present, rabies has been regarded as one of the most terrifying zoonotic diseases. In developed areas of the world, rabies is no longer a significant cause of human mortality, in large part due to stray animal control programs, widespread canine vaccination campaigns, and the availability of safe and effective biologics for human post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP).

Current epidemiologic patterns associated with human and animal rabies in the United States can be summarized as: 1) the annual reports of rabies in wildlife far exceed those of domestic animals; 2) although bats are responsible for a relatively small proportion of nationally reported animal rabies cases in the United States, Bat rabies variants are associated with a disproportionately large number of human rabies infections acquired in the United States; 3) most other human rabies cases diagnosed in the United States can be attributed to infections acquired in areas of enzootic canine rabies outside of the United States; and, 4) a majority of the human rabies cases originating in the United States have no history of animal bite or other event typically associated with rabies virus transmission and many are diagnosed postmortem.

To illustrate these points, this presentation will discuss the recent epidemiology of animal and human rabies in Georgia. Topics will include involving a rabid goat exhibited in a public place, a human rabies case attributed to a lack of recognition of rabies risk, and a discussion of the implications of an alarming trend of rabies cases diagnosed among stray cats. Understanding rabies epidemiology is the foundation for recognition of rabies risk factors and subsequent administration of appropriate control measures such as animal quarantine, PEP, etc. with the ultimate goal of preventing human rabies cases.