



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of STATE PUBLIC HEALTH VETERINARIANS, INC.

CSTE ANNUAL MEETING

CSTE/NASPHV JOINT POSITION STATEMENT 1997-ID-3

COMMITTEE: Infectious Disease

TITLE: Educational and Zoological Exhibits Which Allow Rabies Vector Human Contact

ISSUE: Some educational and zoological exhibits allow potential physical contact between visitors and recognized rabies vector species, including bats.

POSITION TO BE ADOPTED:

CSTE/NASPHV recommends that:

- 1) People be restricted from physical contact with potential rabies vectors (to include, but not be limited to, raccoons, skunks, coyotes, foxes and any type of bat) at educational or zoological exhibits;
- 2) Educational programs on rabies vector species should instruct the public to avoid physical contact with these animals; and
- 3) CDC Quarantine Division modify existing language in their bat quarantine guidelines to clarify that it is unsafe to permit physical contact between bats and zoo visitors regardless of the length of quarantine.

BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION:

More zoological and nature parks are adopting an "open" animal display philosophy. One species of particular concern is the bat, a known rabies vector in the U.S. Seventeen of 20 indigenously acquired human rabies cases since 1980 have been attributed to bat rabies strains. Because bat exposure was not recognized as a rabies risk, these 17 people did not seek rabies post-exposure treatment. ACIP guidelines have recently been modified to recommend rabies post-exposure prophylaxis in cases where exposure to bats has occurred and a bat bite cannot be ruled out. If members of the public are allowed physical contact with bats and other rabies vectors species they may have to be given rabies PEP if the animal cannot be identified or tested for rabies. There are currently walk-through bat exhibits where physical contact between bats and people is possible in multiple zoos in the U.S. Unfortunately, rabies incubation periods in bats may exceed recommended quarantines. Additionally, a new Lyssavirus (rabies-like virus) has been identified in fruit bats for which the natural history and zoonotic potential has not been completely elucidated. Therefore, it is prudent to restrict bat-human contact at educational and zoological exhibits and promote educational messages which foster a respect for bats as wild animals which should not be handled. In addition, physical contact with other rabies vector species, such as coyotes, foxes, raccoons, and skunks, is not advisable.

COORDINATION WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS:

Agencies for Response: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

Agencies for Information: American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA)
American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums
American Association of Zoo Veterinarians
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO)

CONTACT: Connie Austin, D.V.M., M.P.H., Ph.D.
Illinois Department of Public Health
525 W. Jefferson Street
Springfield, Illinois 62761
(217) 785-7165 (tel)
cba9@cdc.gov