



Rabies in the companion animal and wild animal sectors of our environment

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Dr Sandra Norman; I am the director of Companion Animal/Equine at the Indiana State Board of Animal Health (BOAH). Part of BOAH's responsibilities under state law is to administer the rabies vaccination administrative code 345 IAC 1-5-1. I am also a volunteer veterinary surgeon for the Indy Feral organization.

Thank you for your attention to the matter of rabies in the companion animal and wild animal sectors of our environment. While we know decades of continual vaccination of the pet population has helped decrease the incidence of rabies to almost zero in our human population, there is still concern our contact with wild animals increases as we move into territory they called home. This is evidenced by the adaptation of raccoons to our suburban and urban communities and the spread of raccoon strain rabies from the south to the east coast and westward now. The ongoing use of effective vaccinations for our companion animals (Dogs, cats and ferrets) will continue to minimize human potential for infection with this deadly virus. In a telephone survey done in the year 2001, we showed that only about 44% of the owned cat population in the state of Indiana is currently vaccinated for rabies. In support of the Indy Feral proposal to vaccinate their population for rabies, this is an admirable effort to protect the human population. These cats are not "owned"; therefore their vaccination cannot be attributed to an owner. The state cannot require unowned animals to be vaccinated. Since the primary source of rabies is wild life based, by vaccinating our feral cats who have the higher potential to contact wildlife, we add a formidable barrier to our public health efforts to shield the human population from rabies infection. Since we have a three year duration vaccine available to us, we can provide longer protection for both our animal friends and protect the public health.

Revaccination is difficult to attain in a population that is not easily available to handle. Hopefully by spaying and neutering on going generations, we can minimize the number of feral cats or find homes at an earlier age. Since the lifespan of a feral cat is much shorter than the owned cat, it may not live for the duration of its vaccine. Resources would better be spent in spaying and neutering the feral population than trying to track down a cat that three years later may or may not be alive. Since feral populations would be monitored, any abnormal behavior or serious medical events should be noted by the caretaker and brought to the attention of Indy Feral.

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