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Department of Agriculture, PA Veterinary Medical Association Remind Pennsylvania Pet Owners to Maintain Up-to-Date Rabies Vaccinations

Harrisburg, PA – Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding and Pennsylvania Veterinary Medical Association president Dr. Kate Harnish today reminded Pennsylvanians of the importance of getting back on track with regularly scheduled pet vaccinations and boosters. Maintaining up-to-date vaccines is not only important for the health and well-being of cats and dogs, but for the health and safety of Pennsylvanians.

“As we work to safely reopen Pennsylvania and counties move from red to yellow and green phases, it’s important for Pennsylvanians to schedule well visits for their four-legged companions to keep them up to date with necessary vaccines and boosters, especially rabies,” said Agriculture Secretary Redding. “Because of its ability to be transmitted from animals to humans and its fatality rate, rabies vaccines and boosters are incredibly important to be maintained.”

By Pennsylvania law, all cats and dogs three months of age and older are required to have current rabies vaccinations. Even pets that are indoors only are required to be vaccinated. Each year, dog wardens visit neighborhoods across Pennsylvania to conduct dog license and rabies compliance checks. Owners of pets without current rabies vaccines can face fines of up to \$300.

“Veterinarians cannot express enough how important it is to keep your pets up to date on vaccination, especially rabies. When dogs and cats are not vaccinated, it puts them, you, and us at risk. Treating a sick pet without a current rabies vaccine can be problematic, as even the friendliest pets will bite and scratch when they are stressed and do not feel well,” said PVMA president Dr. Kate Harnish. “Vets may have to report these incidents to the PA Bureau of Animal Health, recommend quarantine, or even take more drastic measures such as euthanasia. This is the time of year when potentially rabid wildlife could interact with your pet. Vaccination results in overall improved health.”

Rabies is a virus of the central nervous system that can affect any mammal, it is widespread throughout Pennsylvania. It is of great public health concern because it can be transmitted to humans and is nearly 100 percent fatal without post-exposure treatment. Since 2000, between 350 and 500 animals in Pennsylvania annually are

confirmed in a laboratory to have rabies. The most commonly affected animals are raccoons, bats, skunks, and cats. The last diagnosed human case of rabies in Pennsylvania was in 1984. The best way to prevent the spread of rabies and protect human health is vaccination of domestic mammals.

For more about [Rabies in Pennsylvania](#) visit pa.gov/guides. For a [current map of rabies cases](#) in Pennsylvania, visit agriculture.pa.gov.

For information as it relates to agriculture during COVID-19 mitigation in Pennsylvania visit agriculture.pa.gov/COVID. For the most accurate, timely information related to Health in Pennsylvania, visit on.pa.gov/coronavirus.