



MYTH vs FACT about rabies

MYTH: Responsible dog ownership means you feed your dog well.

Fact: Responsible dog ownership means that you register your dog with the local authorities, you annually vaccinate your dog for rabies, you keep your dogs from roaming the streets, and you feed and care for your dog in an ethically responsible manner.

MYTH: Rabies is transmitted only by the bite of an animal.

Fact: Transmission by the bite of a rabid animal is the most common way. Rabies can also be transmitted through a scratch inflicted by a dog or an animal if fresh saliva is on the nail that causes the scratch. Airborne transmission of rabies may also occur when handling bat guano or in bat caves. Aerosol transmission has been implied in four reports of human rabies cases and documented in experimental work with animals. However, this transmission route has never been reported in Viet Nam.

MYTH: Dog vaccines prevent your dog from getting rabies for only a few months.

Fact: If your dogs are vaccinated against rabies, they are protected for at least one year with each vaccine.

MYTH: Dog owners can choose whether or not to vaccinate their dogs against rabies.

Fact: According to the Viet Nam Government regulations, as a dog owner, you are required to vaccinate your dogs against rabies every year. This protects you, your family and friends, your community and your dogs.

MYTH: A Rabies vaccine for a dog is expensive.

Fact: In Viet Nam, a rabies vaccine costs around 20 000VND per dog. This cost is NOT high compared to 1 000 000 VND which is the cost of a complete course of human vaccination that is necessary if a person is bitten by an unvaccinated dog or a suspected rabid animal.

MYTH: If a dog bites a person, it is only important to care for the person.

Fact: Actually, if a dog bites a person it is necessary to catch the dog and keep it in a room or cage, isolated from other animals and people for 10 days, to observe it for abnormal or rabies like behavior, in addition to making sure the person who was bitten receives proper treatment.

MYTH: Rabies is not life-threatening or fatal to humans.

Fact: Rabies is ALWAYS life-threatening and can result in death if the bite wound is not washed immediately and the post-exposure vaccination is not given in a timely fashion as per the public health requirement.

MYTH: First aid is not necessary to help to a person who has been bitten or scratched by a dog or an animal suspected to be rabid.

Fact: Immediate and thorough washing and cleaning of a bite wound is ESSENTIAL. Flush the wound with a strong stream of water. Wash well with soap or detergent. Next, apply a disinfectant to the wound and surrounding tissue, taking care to get it under skin flaps. Immediately afterwards, take the person to the hospital or vaccination point.

MYTH: The vaccine shots for humans who have been exposed to rabies are dangerous and can make them sick as well as affecting their memory.

Fact: There were some side-effects from the old human vaccine but the new human vaccine that is currently available does not result in those side effects. Registered human rabies vaccines used in Viet Nam have been tested and proven safe. According to the Viet Nam Ministry of Health, annually about 400 000 people received post-bite exposure vaccine in the last five years and side effects have not been reported with these new vaccines.

MYTH: If a traditional healer treats a bite wound, there is no need to see a doctor or go to a medical centre or hospital.

Fact: People with bite wounds that are only treated with traditional medicine are at greater risk of death from rabies, once a person shows clinical symptoms, death is unpreventable.

MYTH: Rabies virus can be detected and treated by traditional medicine when traditional healers treat bite wounds.

Fact: To date, there is no traditional medicine that is proven effective against the rabies virus. Therefore, even if a traditional healer treats your bite wound, you should still proceed to a medical center or hospital so the wound can be properly cleaned and disinfected, and so you can get a post-exposure rabies vaccine.

MYTH: If I were bitten by a vaccinated dog, I do not need a post-exposure human rabies vaccine.

Fact: Even if the dog is vaccinated against rabies, you should still go to the doctor for consultation. The doctor will evaluate the bite wound and advise on whether a post-exposure vaccine is necessary. If you do not seek medical care, you are risking your life.

MYTH: Human-to-human transmission of rabies not possible.

Fact: Humans are mammals. Therefore, theoretically, human-to-human rabies transmission is possible. However, there are no laboratory-tested cases to confirm that this has actually happened.

MYTH: The only thing I can do about the rabies problem is to make sure my pets are vaccinated annually.

Fact: This is important, but only a good first start. There are other ways you can assist in controlling the disease:

- a. Do not let your dogs roam outside the house or yard without a muzzle and leash, even if they are vaccinated;
- b. Cooperate with your local vet and village head to register and vaccinate your dogs annually;
- b. Educate yourself and all members of your family about rabies. In particular, warn young children never to get close to dogs and animals that appear sick or aggressive; and
- d. Call your local vet or village heads when you spot an animal that you suspect is sick or rabid.

