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The costs of rabies: Pilot study in New York State

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New York State (NYS) is representative of many states heavily impacted by raccoon rabies. New York is unique among states in requiring local health departments to cover all costs associated with human postexposure prophylaxis (PEP), animal specimen testing, and no-cost pet vaccination clinics. Some of these costs are reimbursed by the NYS Department of Health (NYSDOH). This study pilots the analysis of costs associated with terrestrial (raccoon) rabies control in NYS. Data for five counties (Albany, Essex, Monroe, Onondaga, and Westchester) were analyzed for three fiscal years (1999-2000 to 2001-2002). Costs related to bat rabies variants were considered separately.

The overall cost of terrestrial rabies control was \$784,529. PEP for 657 people accounted for 79% of these expenses (average cost:\$941). NYSDOH reimbursed 49% of these costs, 43% was covered by insurers, and 8% was paid by LHDs. Cat, dog, and raccoon exposures accounted for 86% of PEP costs. Submission of 2,018 terrestrial animal specimens cost \$70,637, (average of \$35/specimen). NYSDOH reimbursed 91.5% of specimen costs. Cat, raccoon, skunk, and dog heads comprised 82% of specimen expenditures. There were 26,185 animals vaccinated at no-cost pet vaccination clinics at a total cost of \$95,618. The average cost per animal vaccinated was \$3.57.

These analyses represent an initial quantification of the impacts associated with terrestrial rabies, in order to determine the potential savings that may be accrued if oral rabies vaccine can be used to reduce or eliminate rabies variants.

