

World Rabies Day  Canada 2021

# Increasing Access to Rabies Vaccinations in Remote Northern Communities REPORT



Hosted by:

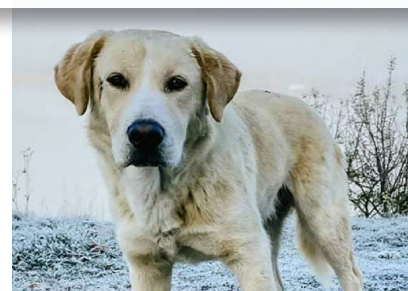


Thank you to our Sponsors:





The Canadian Animal Health Institute (CAHI) partnered with Veterinarians Without Borders — Canada (VWB) to host a collaborative virtual event for World Rabies Day on September 28, 2021, including both a webinar and a workshop.



The nation-wide **World Rabies Day Canada 2021 Webinar** examined the unique challenges of rabies prevention and control in Canada's north, and showcased initiatives which support remote northern Indigenous communities in obtaining and administering rabies vaccines to their dogs to improve both animal and human health.

The webinar began with a presentation from VWB providing an overview of current challenges in rabies prevention in the north, and VWB activities with respect to animal health in northern Canada. These activities include facilitating collaboration and communication among a variety of individuals and groups involved in animal health, undertaking research to map access to veterinary services in remote communities, and an initiative to create a national database of veterinary service organizations that operate in remote and northern communities. VWB's presentation concluded with a video highlighting VWB's work in collecting and sharing community perspectives on rabies.

This was followed by a presentation from CAHI, which outlined how the CAHI World Rabies Day 2021 Initiative to increase awareness of existing

mechanisms under the federal Health of Animals Regulations not only aligns with global rabies prevention and control goals, but also supports the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's calls to action in relation to public health outcomes. This portion of the program wrapped up with a video showcasing a recent collaboration between CAHI, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Zoetis Canada and the Manitoba Animal Alliance to pilot the first direct purchase of rabies vaccines by an Indigenous community, the Cross Lake Band of Indians in northern Manitoba.

Building on the lessons learned from Cross Lake, a provincial perspective on how some of the challenges that remote communities face can be addressed was provided by the newly formed Manitoba Community Lay Vaccinator Working Group, led by the Winnipeg Humane Society. The working group was established to engage various stakeholders to discuss barriers to community lay vaccinator programs in the province and strategies to overcome them, work together to develop a streamlined planning process, and develop a system to measure the impact of the program so that it can be replicated or used as a stepping stone for other programs across Canada.





## Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action

### Call to Action #19



“We call upon the federal government, in consultation with Aboriginal peoples, to establish measurable goals to identify and close the gaps in health outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, and to publish annual progress reports and assess long-term trends. Such efforts would focus on indicators such as: infant mortality, maternal health, suicide, mental health, addictions, life expectancy, birth rates, infant and child health issues, chronic diseases, illness and injury incidence, and the availability of appropriate health services.”

## Health of Animals Regulations

### PART XI Veterinary Biologics

#### Requirements of Operation in a Licensed Establishment Section 134.2

**134.2 (1)** Except as provided in subsection (2), no person shall sell or offer for sale a rabies vaccine to anyone other than a veterinarian of the Department of Agriculture of Canada or a veterinarian who holds a valid licence to practice veterinary medicine issued by the veterinary licensing body of a province.

**(2)** Subsection (1) does not apply in respect of rabies vaccine that is sold or offered for sale in accordance with the written permission granted by the Minister for its use

- (a) in a temporary emergency veterinary clinic; or
- (b) in a remote area where veterinary services are not readily available.

“We love our furbabies just as much as mainstream Canadians do, they are a part of our families too. But we don’t have the same access to healthcare that the rest of the country does. We don’t have a veterinarian here; sometimes we don’t even have a doctor, and I can’t imagine having to shoot my own dog Max if he were bitten by a rabid skunk. A simple vaccine can prevent that, and now we can get vaccines for all our dogs without having to rely on anyone else. This makes our community safer and healthier. It changes everything.”



**Helga Hamilton**  
Health Director,  
Cross Lake Band  
of Indians, Manitoba

From the CAHI video on the pilot with Cross Lake Band of Indians.

## Joe's Story

“At eight o'clock in the morning there was a fox fighting with our pup and when we went out, the fox was rabid; you could tell it was rabid; it was frothing; it wasn't sure where even it was, I think. So my son shot it... At first our pup seemed okay but I know from experience that it takes a while and I didn't want to take chances, so they brought it to Inuvik and they had to put it down.

Not just in Tuk[toyaktuk] but in communities, I think we need somebody that's here. Someone that's going to come in more often and do these vaccines because we can't wait. [Rabies] — it's going to happen and I guarantee you that this fall it's going to be pretty well the same thing, maybe worse.

People say that oh, it's just a bad year. No, it's not. It's gonna happen. And I think that instead of just wishing for the best, we've got to be ready for it. We've got to say, hey, let's put these in place. Let's do something about this before something else [happens and] instead of a pup it might be a kid.”



**Joe Nasogaluak,**  
Artist, Dog Owner, Tuktoyaktuk,  
Northwest Territories

From the VWB video on community perspectives on rabies.

The **World Rabies Day Canada 2021 Workshop** brought together Indigenous, territorial/provincial government and community representatives, with animal health service providers from the Northwest Territories (NWT), Nunavut (NU), Yukon (YT) and northern Quebec (QC). Workshop participants exchanged information on the impact and control of rabies in northern communities and explored mechanisms for improving access to canine rabies vaccinations through enhanced lay vaccinator training and certification.

Territorial and provincial government representatives from NU, the NWT, YT and northern QC, each provided context on the risk of rabies and the situation in their region by describing the current systems in place for rabies prevention and control. Workshop participants were then divided into three breakout rooms to generate discussion around three main questions on current opportunities and challenges to rabies control and vaccination delivery, how a lay vaccinator program could be integrated into current systems, and the role and scope of work for lay vaccinators in communities.

A detailed report from this by invitation only workshop will be shared with the participants by VWB.





## What We Heard

Rabies continues to pose a threat to animal and human populations in Canada's north. The fox variant of rabies is endemic in some regions and outbreaks in wildlife populations can spill over and affect both dog and human populations. Rabies vaccination of domestic dog populations is a critical preventive strategy; however, many northern communities have limited or no access to traditional veterinary vaccination programs. Veterinary clinics are generally unsustainable in remote regions and there are several barriers to clinics in major centres extending regular services out to remote communities. Thus, an alternative method of providing rabies vaccinations to dogs in remote communities is needed and may be possible through the development of a cadre of trained lay (e.g., non-veterinarian) vaccinators.

In 2015, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) called for action by setting a goal of zero human dog-mediated rabies deaths by 2030, worldwide. The global strategic plan known as Zero by 30 calls for the implementation of effective and comprehensive dog vaccination programs which

Aligning with and supporting:

## ZERO BY 30

The Global Strategic Plan to end human deaths from dog-mediated rabies by 2030

achieve >70% vaccination coverage of dogs in all at risk areas, recognizing that "rabies response should be firmly embedded in national efforts to expand community and private sector engagement and to strengthen human and animal health systems, with a view to moving towards universal health coverage for all people". This global call to action to secure universal health coverage is echoed in broader terms by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) Call to Action #19.



To fulfill both the global and the TRC calls to action, there is a need for ongoing efforts to develop practical, effective, and sustainable options for the provision of canine rabies vaccinations to prevent and control rabies in remote Indigenous communities. Lay vaccinators who are remote community members are well positioned to provide regular and sustainable access to rabies vaccinations.

Through the 3 webinar presentations, the following were raised as key considerations for the success of lay vaccinator initiatives:

- Increased awareness in communities of the availability of a vaccine to prevent rabies.
- Increased awareness of the exemption in Article 134.2(2)(b) of the Health of Animals Regulations that allows the sale of rabies vaccines to non-veterinarians in remote areas where veterinary services are not readily available and a clarified process for applying for an exemption.
- A need for nationally standardized definitions, protocols and a training program in place to support lay vaccinator programs.
- A framework to allow formal recognition of vaccinations administered by lay vaccinators in remote areas.

Workshop discussions yielded the following ideas on how to increase access to rabies vaccination in remote northern communities:

- Increase awareness and clarity around options that are available to remote community decision-makers.
- Ensure that programs are community-led.
- Create a nationally recognized program for lay vaccinators.
- Improve trust in rabies vaccines administered by non-veterinarians.
- Understand capacity challenges faced by communities to address constraints related to lay vaccinator recruitment and retention.
- Outline and clarify the scope of work for a lay vaccinator.



# CALLS TO ACTION



Release of the present World Rabies Day Canada 2021 report summarizing information and outcomes of the September 28, 2021 webinar and workshop.



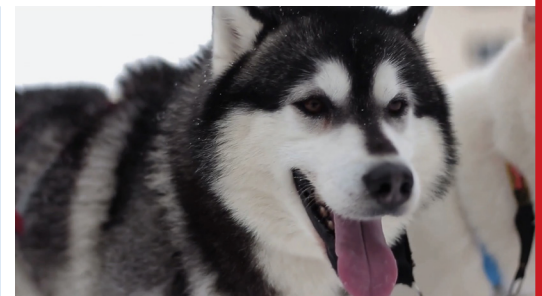
Outreach to, and support for, remote communities who would like to establish their own lay rabies vaccination programs.

Building relationships between remote communities and vaccine manufacturers to facilitate the application process for direct purchases of rabies vaccines and navigate logistical challenges.



The development of standardized training and resources which are accessible to remote communities, and that are updated on a regular basis, in support of lay vaccinator programs.

Creation of a national working group to develop and support nationally standardized protocols for lay vaccinator programs.



## What We Are Doing Next

### Canadian Animal Health Institute:

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1. Working with VWB to submit a joint formal request to the federal government for the creation of a national working group on increasing rabies vaccination of dogs in remote northern indigenous communities, including:
    - Draft of a proposed Terms of Reference for a national working group;
    - Engagement with the Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health and the Council of Chief Veterinary Officers; and
    - A call for funding to support the initiative.
  2. Collaborating with the Canadian Centre for Veterinary Biologics at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to create a standard form and supporting guidance document for requests for rabies vaccine exemptions under Article 134.2(2)(b) of the Health of Animals Regulations.
  3. Working with CAHI member companies to better understand and manage the logistical challenges of shipping canine rabies vaccines to remote communities in northern Canada.
  4. Hosting a follow-up World Rabies Day event in 2022 to report back on progress to all stakeholders.
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### Veterinarians Without Borders — Canada:

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1. Recruiting a Northern Program Manager to map out a plan to address the barriers identified during the workshop over the next few years, in collaboration with local communities, governments, partners and other stakeholders.
  2. Creating a publicly available, interactive, national database of veterinary service organizations that can continue to be populated and updated.
  3. Continuing to work with the Manitoba Lay Vaccinator Working Group to address lessons learned and move forward on deliverables.
  4. Working with the proposed National Working Group to develop a sustainable, recognized, and standardized training program for lay vaccinators.
  5. Working with local communities, governments, partners, and other stakeholders to address the current barriers to the recruitment and retention of lay vaccinators in partner communities.
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**Canadian Animal Health Institute**  
[cahi-icsa.ca](http://cahi-icsa.ca)  
[cahi@cahi-icsa.ca](mailto:cahi@cahi-icsa.ca)

**Veterinarians Without Borders**  
[vetswithoutborders.ca](http://vetswithoutborders.ca)  
[info@vetswithoutborders.ca](mailto:info@vetswithoutborders.ca)