

**A Public Health
Perspective on Stray
Cat Management:
Keeping Communities Safe
& Preventing Disease**

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Public Health Challenges

- Humane control of feral cats is mutual goal
- Managed cat colonies are not without concern
 - Rabies & zoonotic disease
 - Challenges in trapping/revaccinating
 - Interaction w/wildlife: reservoirs & predation
 - Mixed results in population decline
 - Economic advantages are disputable
 - Doesn't replace responsible pet ownership



Rabies

- The greatest concern of health officials
- New Jersey data since January 1989
 - 418 rabid cats and 7 rabid dogs¹
 - 90% of domestic animal rabies cases
 - *All cats should have current vaccination²*
 - Dog licensing/vaccination
 - Statutory requirement for seven decades
 - Proven to have diminished risk in NJ
 - Once 8000 dogs/year in U.S.

¹ NJDOH 2014

² National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians 2011



Rabies

- Potential for risk where people & cats interact
- Every scratch & bite must be assumed to be a potential rabies exposure
- >25,000 cats submitted for rabies diagnosis in U.S. each year¹
- 38,000 receive rabies PEP in U.S. each year²
- Cats account for substantial proportion of PEP³
- Extensive investigation *and* >\$2,000 in medical care per person for PEP⁴

¹ *Blanton et al 2011*

³ *Hensley 1998, Moore 2000*

² *Chrisian et al 2009*

⁴ *Shwiff et al 2007*

Trapping & Revaccinating

- Initial vaccination is only effective for one year
- Stray cats are susceptible if they are not trapped & revaccinated
- Most cats in colonies are only trapped once in their lifetime¹
- Many cats in colonies live >6 years,² so more than one vaccination is necessary
- Annual trapping rates as low as 10%³
- Need accurate census of colonies to determine vaccination rates

¹ Richards et al 2006

² Levy 2003

³ Foley et al 2005



Other Zoonotic Diseases

- Concern to cats & humans
- Cat density & proximity to wildlife increases potential¹
 - Parasites
 - Rickettsial diseases
 - Toxoplasmosis
 - Cat Scratch fever
 - Plague
 - Feline leukemia & FIV

¹ Nutter 2004, McElroy 2010, Little 2011, Al-Kappany 2011



Wildlife: Disease Reservoirs

- Cats are more likely to encounter wildlife¹
 - Nocturnal habits
 - Indoor/outdoor presence
- Feeding in colonies puts cats at enhanced risk²
 - Feline Respiratory Disease Complex
- Group feeding provides interface w/reservoirs
 - Florida feral cats & raccoons/opossums³

¹ *Little 2011, CDC 2008, Levy 2003, Olson, 2000*

² *Cohn 2011*

³ *Levy 2003*



Wildlife: Predation

- Feral cats are obligate predators
- Can have ecological effects on native species
 - Evidence shows reduced native bird & mammal populations¹
 - Supplemental feeding attracts cats without reducing their hunting behavior²

¹ *Baker et al 2008*

² *Hawkins et al 1999*



Other Public Health Concerns

- Nuisances
 - Trespass
 - Litter & debris
 - Feces & urine
 - Spraying/yowling
 - Allergies
 - Non-target species attracted to food

TNVM & Population

- Evidence that TNVM may not reduce population¹
 - Adequate sterilization rates are extremely difficult to achieve²
 - Cats are relocated from other locations
 - Caregivers may move, get sick and/or become overwhelmed

¹ Longcore et al 2009, Natoli et al 2006, Gunther et al 2011, Castillo and Clarke 2003

² Jones and Downs 2011, Foley et al 2005

Conclusion

- **Responsible** pet ownership is critical
- Managed colonies – significant public health risk
- CDC recommends that strays be removed from the community
- ***First priority is to protect public safety***

Reality



Reality

- European Advisory Board on Cat Diseases (ABCD)



Reality

