Rabies outbreak on Svalbard in 2011
Svalbard- an archipelago in the Arctic

- Is the northernmost part of Norway
- Between 74°-81° North & 10°-35° East
- Consists of islands of various sizes, the largest of which is Spitzbergen
- Covers 61,000 km², of which more than half is comprised of snow and ice
- Human population of 2,539
The Settlements

Longyearbyen

• The largest settlement in Svalbard and the Norwegian administrative centre

• Inhabited by 2,075 people, most of them Norwegians, though nearly 40 nationalities are represented

Barentsburg

• The second largest settlement in Svalbard

• Inhabited by 500 people, mostly Russians
Organisation

- Svalbard became a part of Norway in 1925
- Norway administers and enforces law and regulations
- The Governor of Svalbard is the Norwegian government’s supreme representative
- Svalbard is not covered by the EEA Agreement
  - Due to this there are strict regulations for sending or bringing animals and animal products from Svalbard to the mainland
  - There is rabies on Svalbard, while the mainland is rabies-free
The Svalbard Animals

Svalbard has two species of land mammals:

- **The Arctic fox** (Alopex lagopus)
  - Common almost all over Svalbard
  - Can cover large distances and roams way out onto the ice floes
  - Important vectors for rabies and Echinococcus multilocularis

- **The Svalbard reindeer** (Rangifer tarandus platyrhynchus)
  - Distinct breed of reindeer not found anywhere else
  - Does not live in herds, but tends to appear alone or with few other individuals
  - Population of about 11,000
Rabies on Svalbard

- Endemic disease throughout most parts of the Arctic
- The Arctic fox is the main host of the virus
- Rabies was diagnosed for the first time in 1980 during an outbreak in the Arctic fox population
- From 1980-1999, 25 animals have been diagnosed with rabies on the islands
- No further cases until diagnosed in a single Arctic fox in January 2011
The outbreak

- **September 12th 2011**: Woman attacked by Arctic fox near Longyearbyen
- Norwegian Veterinary Institute performed the autopsy, and the fox tested positive for rabies (classical rabies genotype 1, serotype 1)
- Dead foxes and reindeer, and animals with unusual behaviour are collected and tested.
- **Per October 1st 2011**: 2 foxes and 6 reindeer from Svalbard have tested positive (+ 4 new animals investigated this week)
Measures

• The Governor of Svalbard cooperates closely with The Norwegian Food Safety Authority, The National Veterinary Institute and The Norwegian Institute of Public Health

• Sick and dead animals are collected for testing

• Foxes are trapped and destroyed to reduce the risk of virus transmission

• The fox hunting season is postponed
Recommendations to the public

• Hunters and other persons exposed to sick or dead animals are offered
  – post exposure prophylaxis
  – vaccination
  – immunoglobulin therapy to persons with high risk contact

• All inhabitants recommended to take proper precautions and avoid contact with dead animals or animals behaving abnormally

• All dogs on the islands must be kept on a leash
Thank you for your attention!