



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Immunize your pets during Rabies Awareness/Dog Bite Prevention Week

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health has designated June 9-14 as Rabies Awareness and Dog Bite Prevention Week in Alabama, a time to remind the public that Alabama law requires all dogs and cats to be vaccinated against rabies each year and that they can help prevent dog bites.

Rabies is a disease of all warm-blooded mammals, including man, and is universally fatal if specialized anti-rabies treatment is not implemented in a timely manner. Raccoons, bats and foxes are most often responsible for transmitting the rabies virus to domestic animals and humans. Immunizing dogs and cats against rabies provides the only "buffer" between wildlife and humans.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 800,000 Americans seek medical attention for dog bites each year; half of those bitten are children. Of those injured, 386,000 require treatment in an emergency department and about a dozen die. The rate of dog bite-related injuries is highest for children ages 5 to 9 years, and the rate decreases as children age. Almost two-thirds of injuries among children ages 4 years and younger are to the head or neck region. Injury rates in children are significantly higher for boys than for girls.

"Animals of any breed can bite on occasion, especially if provoked or startled," said Associate State Public Health Veterinarian, Dr. Dee Jones. "It is important to always use caution when approaching strange animals, and never attempt to pet a stray or injured animal."

As summer outdoor activities begin, remember to warn children to avoid touching, picking up, or feeding wild or unfamiliar animals. Always avoid sick or strange-acting animals. Avoid any wild animal that appears friendly, docile or approaches humans. Nocturnal animals, such as raccoons and bats that become active in the daytime, may be suspect. Stray animals pose a continuous public health threat; not only from rabies, but also from bite wounds and animal attacks in general.

"A good rule of thumb is, if you can pet a wild animal, don't," says Dr. Jones. There are approximately 8,500 animal bites investigated each year in the state, and last year there were 80 laboratory confirmed rabies cases in wild animal species. Domestic animals accounted for only 1.25 percent of positive rabies submissions cases in 2007.

If bitten or scratched by an animal, wash the wound with soapy water for 10 minutes and seek medical attention immediately. Do not attempt to capture or kill the animal. Call local law enforcement officials or your animal control officer. If your pet is scratched or bitten by another animal, contact your veterinarian.

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