



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

RSA Tower 201 Monroe Street, Suite 914 Montgomery, AL 36104

Phone 334-206-5300 Fax 334-206-5534

www.adph.org

Health authorities advise the public not to handle wildlife, transport or keep them as pets

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Karen Landers, M.D.

James Congleton

(256) 383-1231

Dee W. Jones, D.V.M.

(334) 206-5969

Recent rabies exposures involving raccoons and a stray kitten prompt reminders that the public should avoid handling wildlife and unknown animals. In Baldwin County, the Alabama Department of Public Health has confirmed one of four baby raccoons tested was positive for rabies and has identified all children and adults exposed. Health authorities are working with medical providers to evaluate the need for appropriate treatment.

The baby raccoons were transported to a family's residence in northwest Alabama. In Lee County, several persons who handled a rabid stray kitten at the Lee County Humane Shelter have been identified and those who have been exposed are beginning a treatment regimen.

"We strongly urge people not to handle wildlife, stray animals and bats," said Dr. Dee W. Jones, State Public Health Veterinarian. "As these examples illustrate, exposure to rabies can be avoided by leaving wildlife in the wild. Furthermore, the act of transporting wildlife in Alabama is illegal."

With these incidents in mind, public health officials encourage pet owners to ensure their dogs, cats and ferrets are vaccinated against the fatal disease. To protect yourself, your family and your pets from exposure to the rabies virus, follow these precautions:

- Avoid domestic and wild animals that are acting in a strange or unusual manner.
- Teach children to stay away from animals that are hurt or unknown to them.
- Instruct children to avoid approaching any wild animal, whether or not it is acting strangely.
- Advise children to tell an adult if they are bitten or scratched by an animal.

If you get an animal bite or scratch, wash the wound thoroughly under running water, immediately seek medical attention from your doctor or a hospital, and report the incident to your county health department for follow-up.

Rabies is a disease of all mammals, including humans, and is always considered to be fatal unless preventative treatment is given following the exposure. The primary means of exposure is through a bite or scratch with contaminated saliva from the animal. Transmission of the deadly virus also can occur if saliva contacts mucous membranes of the eye or mouth.

Pets can be a common connection between wildlife and humans. Vaccination of domestic dogs, cats and ferrets not only protects the animals against rabies, but also creates an additional protective buffer between wildlife rabies and humans. State law requires that dogs, cats and ferrets remain currently vaccinated against rabies. The law also requires that if a pet bites or scratches a human, it must be quarantined for a period of 10 days immediately afterward. As an additional incentive to keep pets vaccinated, pets with proof of vaccination may be authorized in certain circumstances to be quarantined at home instead of in a veterinary clinic.

For more information please contact the Alabama Department of Public Health, Bureau of Communicable Disease, Epidemiology Division, at 1-800-677-0939. Additional information is available at adph.org/rabies/.