



## NEWS RELEASE

### ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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## Rabid raccoons found in Shelby County; be sure to vaccinate pets

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Recent surveillance for rabies in the raccoon population near Columbiana in Shelby County has revealed three positive cases. The current area of focus includes a two-mile radius around the Beeswax Creek boat launch area, where the most recent of the positive raccoons was discovered.

The ongoing surveillance is being conducted by the USDA Wildlife Services (WS) along with the Alabama Department of Public Health. The surveillance began in response to a rabid puppy found in February that was confirmed to be infected with a raccoon variant of the rabies virus.

The primary concern is that these positive cases have been found in an area where raccoon rabies is not typically found. According to Dana Johnson, a USDA WS biologist, the primary focus will be expanding the surveillance areas to try to determine the extent that the rabies virus has spread. Situations similar to this where rabies has been found in unexpected areas have happened occasionally in recent years in Jefferson and Montgomery counties.

Dr. Dee W. Jones, State Public Health Veterinarian, states, "When positives are found, there is an action plan in place to widen the surveillance area until no positives are being found, which gives a better assurance that the virus has been contained."

In the meantime, according to Dr. Jones, the best way to protect yourself and pets is to keep the pets currently vaccinated against rabies. "It is important for people to take precautions, such as avoiding wildlife and other unknown animals that may have been previously exposed and could be shedding the rabies in their saliva."

To protect yourself, your family and your pets from exposure to the rabies virus, you should follow these precautions.

- Avoid domestic animals that are acting in a strange or unusual manner.
- Instruct children to avoid approaching any non-domesticated animal regardless of its behavior.
- Advise children to tell an adult if they are bitten or scratched by an animal.

Rabies is a disease of all mammals, including man, and is always considered to be fatal unless preventative treatment is given following the exposure which is usually a bite or a scratch. If you get an animal bite or scratch, flush the wound thoroughly with either water or a dilute povidone-iodine solution. This solution, available in drug stores, decreases the risk of bacterial infection.

Immediately seek medical attention from your doctor or a hospital and report the incident to the local county health department so that appropriate quarantine or testing takes place. Transmission of the deadly virus also can occur if saliva contacts mucous membranes of the eye or mouth. A physician should always be consulted to determine if an exposure has occurred and preventative treatment is needed.

Public Health officials recommend that the recent rabid raccoons should further encourage pet owners to be sure their dogs, cats and ferrets are vaccinated against the fatal disease. Pets can have an unknown contact with a wild animal then potentially expose humans to rabies following an incubation period. Vaccination is very effective in reducing the risk for a pet to become infected with the virus in the event of an exposure to another animal shedding the virus. State law requires that dogs, cats and ferrets remain currently vaccinated against rabies.

For additional information please contact the Alabama Department of Public Health, Bureau of Communicable Disease, Division of Epidemiology, at 1-800-677-0939.