



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Rabid raccoon in Foley is reminder of need to take precautions

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Rabies in wildlife continues to be a public health threat locally and throughout much of Alabama. Raccoons and bats are the primary reservoir species for rabies, but the virus can infect other animals such as dogs, cats, foxes, coyotes and skunks. A rabid raccoon in the Foley area in Baldwin County has prompted public health officials to issue precautions about rabies prevention in humans and animals.

According to State Public Health Veterinarian Dr. Dee W. Jones, “Rabies in raccoons is not really anything new to this area; however, the biggest challenge for rabies control continues to be keeping it out of the domestic animal population.” Raccoons can spread rabies through infected saliva by biting or scratching a pet. An infected pet becomes extremely dangerous for owners, family members, and other animals that come into contact with it.

The Alabama Department of Public Health tests animals that have bitten or scratched people or their pets. Each year, approximately 50 samples test positive, with raccoons and bats accounting for the vast majority. In Baldwin County, since 2011, there have been six positive raccoons, two foxes, and one bat. Dr. Jones cautions, however, “It is important to note that the positive samples tested only represent those that exposed a person or an animal, which is a fraction of the total positive animals in the wild.”

Once rabies develops in an animal, it is always considered to be fatal. The good news is that rabies can be prevented in animals by vaccination. Alabama state law requires that all dogs, cats and ferrets must be kept current with rabies vaccination. Rabies vaccines are also available for horses and other livestock if recommended by a veterinarian.

In addition to vaccinating animals, the following precautions should be taken to avoid possible exposure to rabies:

- Don't go near domestic animals that are acting in a strange or unusual manner.
- Instruct children not to go near any non-domesticated animal regardless of its behavior.
- Advise children to tell an adult if they are bitten or scratched by an animal.

- Never touch a bat, and contact the county health department if you suspect a bat has been in contact with sleeping adults, unattended children, or pets.

A person who is bitten or scratched by an animal should wash wounds immediately with mild soap and water, apply first aid, and seek medical attention or contact the county health department as soon as possible. Rabies is preventable in humans exposed to a positive animal if special medical treatment is provided in a timely manner.

For more information, contact the Alabama Department of Public Health, Bureau of Communicable Disease, Division of Epidemiology, at 1-800-338-8734 or the Baldwin County Health Department at (251) 972-6834.