



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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State agencies work to combat introduction of monkeypox to Alabama; Persons acquiring prairie dogs and African rodents advised to contact their local health department

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama departments of Agriculture and Industries, Conservation and Natural Resources, and Public Health are working together to lessen the chances that monkeypox virus could be introduced into the state.

As of June 18, monkeypox, an illness native to Africa, has been diagnosed in 93 persons in Ohio, Wisconsin, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas and Indiana. These illnesses have been linked to prairie dogs exposed to certain pet rodents imported from Africa and distributed to several states. Alabama is not one of the states where these potentially infected pet rodents are known to have been distributed.

Federal and state regulations are in effect to ban the traffic and possession of these pets. On June 11, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Food and Drug Administration issued an order announcing an immediate embargo on the importation, sale, distribution, transport and release into the environment of all rodents from Africa. Furthermore, the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources has for years prohibited the sale and possession of wild rodents in Alabama.

State Health Officer Dr. Williamson said, "There is no reason to suspect that infected rodents are in Alabama, but we want to work with everyone to assure monkeypox is not inadvertently introduced into the state."

To prevent monkeypox virus from gaining a permanent foothold in the United States, it is crucial that all animals linked to the original infected shipment be identified and properly disposed. Persons who have acquired any one of the following animals since April 1, 2003, should call their local county health department.

Health department staff will ascertain whether owners and their pets are reportedly in good health. Then they will contact staff of the departments of Conservation and Natural Resources and Agriculture and Industries for further follow-up. It is very important that owners not release

these animals into the environment. To promote cooperation by the public, the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources will not cite owners of pet prairie dogs or other wild rodents identified through this cooperative effort.

The animals of concern include prairie dogs (*Cynomys* species) and the African rodents:

- Tree squirrels (*Heliosciurus* species)
- Rope squirrels (*Funiscurus* species)
- Dormices (*Graphiurus* species)
- Gambian Giant Pouched Rats (*Cricetomys* species)
- Brush-tailed porcupines (*Atherurus* species),
 - Striped mice (*Hybomys* species)

Persons who have acquired any of these listed animals since April 1 are asked to contact their county health department. The state agencies are working in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on this effort.

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