



## NEWS RELEASE

### ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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## Rabid raccoon in Conecuh County prompts reminder to immunize pets

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The diagnosis of a rabid raccoon in the Flat Rock Community of Conecuh County has prompted public officials to encourage pet owners to ensure their dogs and cats are vaccinated against the fatal disease.

On May 10, a Flatrock pet owner observed a raccoon fighting with his dog. He killed the raccoon and took it to Dr. Carl Wilson who is the Conecuh County Rabies Officer and the county's only veterinarian. Dr. Wilson contacted the Conecuh County Health Department because he suspected rabies. The raccoon was sent to the Mobile Division Public Health Laboratory where it was tested and it was confirmed that the raccoon was rabid.

Steve Mitchell, environmental supervisor with the Conecuh County Health Department, said, "We strongly caution people not to approach stray animals, wildlife and bats."

Rabies is a disease of all warm-blooded mammals, including man. The disease is almost always fatal in humans if preventive treatment is not obtained.

According to Alabama public health laws, all animal bites are reportable to the Alabama Department of Public Health. The primary means of exposure is through a bite or scratch with contaminated saliva contacting the wound. Transmission of the deadly virus can also occur if saliva contacts a mucous membrane such as the eye or mouth.

The most consistent clinical sign of rabies in animals is an observable change from normal behavior. Any wild animals that suddenly appear friendly, docile or approach humans should be considered suspect of being infected, and therefore avoided. Nocturnal animals that are active in the daytime should be considered to be rabid. Each year several exposures occur in Alabama when raccoons and foxes expose children and pets.

Dr. Dee W. Jones, associate state public health veterinarian, said, "Generally, it is best to contact animal control professionals before attempting to help or handle strangely behaving or injured wildlife, bats or stray animals."

Vaccination of domestic dogs and cats not only protects the animals against rabies, but also provides the most effective means of creating a protective rabies buffer zone free of rabies for

the human population. State law requires that dogs and cats 3 months of age and older be vaccinated for rabies by a veterinarian.

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