



Rabid fox in Conecuh County prompts reminder to immunize pets and exercise caution

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The diagnosis of a rabid fox in the Lyeffion Community of Conecuh County is the second rabid animal found in the county in a matter of weeks, and this has public officials very concerned. The Alabama Department of Public Health encourages pet owners to ensure their dogs and cats are vaccinated against the fatal disease.

On June 6, a Lyeffion pet owner observed a fox fighting with his dog. He killed the fox and took it to Conecuh County Rabies officer Dr. Carl Wilson, who contacted the Conecuh County Health Department because he suspected rabies. The fox was sent to the Mobile Division Public Health Laboratory where it was tested and it was confirmed that the fox 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 and be certain to impress upon your children the real danger in doing so."

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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