



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Rabies suspected after fox attacks an area resident in the afternoon

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Escambia County Health Department recently was notified of a resident who was attacked and bitten by a fox. The exposure occurred in the individual's backyard during the afternoon hours. Efforts to locate the fox after the exposure were unsuccessful, therefore officials were unable to test the animal for rabies.

Due to the suspicious nature of the attack and for public safety reasons, the Escambia County Health Department is treating this incident as a suspected case of rabies.

Casey Grant, Senior Environmentalist with the Escambia County Health Department, stated, "It is always a cause for concern when a nocturnal animal, such as a raccoon or fox is acting suspicious during daylight hours, especially when the animal is not afraid to approach humans. Raccoons, bats, foxes and skunks are most often responsible for transmitting the virus to domesticated animals and humans."

Public health officials encourage pet owners to be sure their dogs, cats and ferrets are vaccinated against the fatal disease.

"We strongly caution people not to approach stray animals, wildlife and bats," said Dr. Dee W. Jones, State Public Health Veterinarian. "To protect yourself, your family and your pets from exposure to the rabies virus, you should follow these precautions."

- Avoid domestic and wild animals that are acting in a strange or unusual manner.
- Teach children to stay away from animals that are hurt or unknown to them.
- Instruct children to avoid approaching any wild animal, whether or not it is acting strangely.
- Advise children to tell an adult if they are bitten or scratched by an animal.

If you get an animal bite or scratch, wash the wound thoroughly under running water, immediately seek medical attention from your doctor or a hospital, and report the incident to the Escambia County Health Department for follow-up. Be sure your pets have up-to-date rabies vaccinations.

Rabies is a disease of all mammals, including man, and is always considered to be fatal unless preventative treatment is given following the bite. The primary means of exposure is through a bite or scratch with contaminated saliva from the animal. Transmission of the deadly virus also can occur if saliva contacts mucous membranes of the eye or mouth.

Pets can be a common connection between wildlife and humans. Vaccination not only protects the pets against rabies, but also creates a protective buffer between wildlife rabies and humans. State law requires that dogs, cats and ferrets remain currently vaccinated against rabies. The law also requires that if a pet bites or scratches a human, it must be quarantined for a period of 10 days immediately afterward. As an additional incentive to keep pets vaccinated, pets with proof of vaccination may be authorized in certain circumstances to be quarantined at home instead of in a veterinary clinic.

For additional information please contact the Alabama Department of Public Health, Bureau of Communicable Disease, Division of Epidemiology, at 1-800-677-0939 or Casey Grant, Environmental Services, (251) 867-5765.