



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Be aware of the need to vaccinate your pets for rabies and protect against dog bites

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health has designated June 15-19, 2015, as Rabies Awareness and Dog Bite Prevention Week in Alabama, a time to remind the public that Alabama law requires all dogs, cats and ferrets to be currently vaccinated against rabies and that most animal bites can be prevented.

Rabies is a disease of all mammals, including man, and is always considered to be fatal unless preventative treatment is given following the exposure. 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 the mucous membranes of the eye or mouth.

Vaccination of domestic dogs, cats and ferrets not only protects the animals against rabies, but also minimizes human risk by reducing rabies in domesticated animals. During Rabies and Dog Bite Awareness Week many county rabies officers will be conducting rabies vaccination clinics at reduced fees. Please contact your county rabies officer, a licensed veterinarian appointed by the Alabama Department of Public Health, for additional information about any upcoming rabies vaccination clinics in your county.

The State Public Health Veterinarian, Dr. Dee W. Jones, notes that in many areas of Alabama, rabies in wildlife species, particularly raccoons, is on the rise and spreading to areas previously thought to not have the infection. He states, "Increases in wildlife rabies increases the risks that people's pets can be exposed, and coupled with low vaccination rates in domestic animals, is a recipe for increased rabies transmissions."

Hundreds of thousands of Americans seek medical attention for animal bites each year-- many of those bitten are children. "Animals of any breed can bite on occasion, especially if provoked or startled," said Dr. Jones. "It is important to always use caution when approaching strange animals, and never attempt to pet a stray or injured animal."

The Alabama Department of Public Health recommends that 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 your county health department for follow-up. Additionally, using the following protective measures can help avoid exposure to the rabies virus:

- 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.

For more information about rabies, bite prevention or contact information for the rabies officer in your county, please contact your local county health department or the Alabama Department of Public Health Division of Epidemiology at 1-800-338-8374 or (334) 206-5971.

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