



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

RSA Tower 201 Monroe Street, Suite 914 Montgomery, AL 36104

Phone 334-206-5300 Fax 334-206-5520

www.adph.org

Rabid wildlife in Montgomery serve as a reminder of the risk of rabies in the area

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Dee W. Jones, D.V.M.
(334) 206-5969

The Alabama Department of Public Health and City of Montgomery officials are issuing a reminder about the public health risk associated with rabies following the identification of three positive animals in the Dalraida neighborhood. Over the past few days, a raccoon, a bat, and a flying squirrel were each confirmed by laboratory testing to be positive for rabies.

Rabies in wildlife species, especially in raccoons, is considered a common occurrence in Montgomery and surrounding areas; although it has been several years since the last positive raccoon was identified. Rabies infects approximately 1 percent of all bats, regardless of their location. Flying squirrels are rarely infected and are thought to be one of the very few rodents at risk of contracting rabies due to their close habitat with bats.

Rabies, a virus that infects the central nervous system of all mammals, is always fatal. The virus usually causes neurological signs including behavioral changes, in-coordination, excessive salivation, and sometimes aggression. The virus is transmitted between animals, and potentially to humans, from saliva containing the virus. In general, rabies exposure requires direct contact with infected saliva, usually through a bite or a scratch, but other less common contact exposures with mucous membranes (eyes, nose, mouth) should be considered as potential exposures.

Rabies infection in people is 100 percent preventable if appropriate medical treatment is received in a timely manner following exposure. Any animal bite or scratch should be reported to your medical provider or to the health department.

Dr. Dee W. Jones, the State Public Health veterinarian, says, "Rabies prevention is multi-faceted; it involves people taking precautions with wildlife, making sure their pets are kept current on rabies vaccinations, and always reporting an animal bite or other exposure to their medical provider or the health department."

Montgomery Mayor Todd Strange said the city is in close contact with Public Health and the Montgomery Humane Society, and that all city first responders have been alerted to the positive test results. "We understand from Public Health that this is not a particularly unusual event, and we appreciate this opportunity to increase awareness about the risk of rabies and the importance of prevention," said Mayor Strange.

Alabama law requires all dogs, cats and ferrets to be currently vaccinated against rabies. According to Dr. Jones, rabies in wildlife species is certainly a concern, but the potential spread into the pet population is the most concerning because of the close contact between pets and humans.

Although wildlife presence in neighborhoods is unavoidable, some common practices will help reduce the risk--animal owners should avoid leaving pet food or table scraps outside uncovered, keep pets on leashes or inside of fenced-in yards, firmly secure trash receptacle tops, and pick up litter that might attract wildlife.

The Alabama Department of Public Health recommends the following for rabies prevention:

- Keep pets current on their rabies vaccinations.
- Avoid animals, domesticated or wild, that are injured or acting in a strange or unusual manner.
- Report strange-acting animals to animal control authorities.
- Advise children to tell an adult if they are bitten or scratched by an animal.
- Seek medical attention for any potential exposure to a rabid animal, including bats.
- Wash any bite wound with mild soap thoroughly under running water.

For more information about rabies and prevention, please contact the Montgomery County Health Department at (334) 293-6452 or the Alabama Department of Public Health, Infectious Diseases & Outbreaks Division, at 1-800-338-8374 or (334) 206-5971 or visit <http://www.adph.org/epi/default.asp?id=3385>. The Montgomery Humane Society may be reached Monday through Friday, 8 a.m.-6 p.m., at (334) 409-0622, or after hours at (334) 241-2651.