



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

Immunize your pets during Rabies Awareness/Animal Bite Prevention Week

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

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

The Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) has designated June 13-17 as Rabies Awareness and Animal Bite Prevention Week in Alabama, a time to remind the public that Alabama law requires all dogs, cats and ferrets to be vaccinated against rabies. This week also highlights the importance of animal bite prevention. The ADPH annually investigates thousands of potential rabies exposures, most commonly caused by animal bites or scratches.

Rabies is a fatal disease that is spread in the saliva of infected animals. All warm-blooded mammals, including humans, can become infected, however, rabies is preventable through vaccination. People that are potentially exposed may need to receive vaccines to neutralize the virus. It is very important that treatment is implemented in a timely manner following any exposure to the virus. Likewise, immunizing pets against rabies provides protection for not only the animal, but also for people that may be in contact with the animal.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the rate of dog bite related injuries is highest for children ages 5 to 9 years, and the rate decreases as children age. Almost two-thirds of injuries among children ages 4 years and younger are to the head or neck region.

“Animals of any breed can bite on occasion, especially if provoked or startled,” said Dr. Dee W. Jones, State Public Health Veterinarian. “It is important to always use caution when approaching strange animals, and never attempt to pet a stray or injured animal.”

As summer outdoor activities begin, remember to warn children to avoid touching, picking up, or feeding wild or unfamiliar animals. Always avoid sick or strange-acting animals. Avoid any wild animal that appears friendly, docile or approaches humans. Animals usually seen at night, such as raccoons and bats that become active in the daytime, may be suspect.

Raccoons, bats and foxes are most often responsible for transmitting the rabies virus to domestic animals and humans. Dr. Jones stated, “Bites from strays or wildlife animals, such as raccoons or foxes, are most concerning because of the increased risk of rabies. Annually, 90 percent of confirmed rabies cases are from wild animals.”

A person who is bitten or scratched by an animal should wash wounds immediately with mild soap and water, apply first aid, and seek medical attention or contact the county health department immediately.

For more information, log on to www.adph.org or contact the Alabama Department of Public Health, Bureau of Communicable Disease, Infectious Diseases and Outbreaks Division, at 1-800-338-8734.

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