

NEWS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Take steps to prevent rabies infection

(Lawrence, KS) – As warmer weather approaches, Lawrence and Douglas County residents are urged to take precautions against rabies exposure from domestic and wild animals such as bats, raccoons, skunks and foxes.

Rabies is an infectious disease that affects the nervous system of humans and other mammals. People and unvaccinated animals get rabies from the bite of an infected animal or if saliva from the animal gets directly into a person's eyes, nose, mouth or any break in the skin. Rabies is nearly always fatal if not treated after exposure.

If a wild animal is found in or near a home, call a private pest control company for assistance. Contact the Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department to assess whether there was a potential for rabies exposure. If bitten by any wild animal or stray domestic animal, wash the affected area thoroughly with soap and water and seek medical attention immediately.

It is estimated that every year 40,000 U.S. residents are potentially exposed to rabies requiring human rabies post-exposure preventive treatment. Skunks are the main source for rabies in Kansas.

“Rabies prevention starts with the animal owner,” said Richard Ziesenis, Director of Environmental Health at the Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department. “We recommend that people vaccinate dogs, cats, ferrets and any other animal that has regular contact with humans, such as horses.”

Because most domestic animals are vaccinated, wild animals are more likely than domestic animals to be infected with rabies. Domestic cats, dogs, ferrets and horses can become infected if they are not vaccinated. Small mammals such as squirrels, rats, mice, hamsters, guinea pigs, gerbils, chipmunks or rabbits are almost never found to be infected with rabies and have not been reported to cause human rabies in the United States.

Follow these tips to prevent rabies:

- Never handle a wild animal like a bat, raccoon, skunk or fox.

- If you wake up in a room with a bat present, regardless if there is evidence of a bite or scratch, seek medical attention. If at all possible, trap the bat for testing. Do not release the bat.
- Wash animal bites thoroughly with soap and water and seek medical attention immediately.
- If bitten by a wild animal, capture and contain the animal if possible. Call a pest control company to assist with trapping, testing and/or observation of the animal. The City of Lawrence Animal Control Department may also assist with removing stray domestic animals from your yard, home or neighborhood regardless of a bite.
- Teach children never to handle unfamiliar animals, wild or domestic, even if they appear friendly.
- Prevent bats and raccoons from entering homes or spaces where people and pets may be present.
- Keep vaccinations current for dogs, cats and ferrets. Keep cats and ferrets inside and dogs under direct supervision. Consider having your pets spayed or neutered.

For more information, call the Environmental Health program at the Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department at (785) 843-3060.

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