

NEWS RELEASE

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For immediate release

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As people take to the outdoors to enjoy the warmer weather, Panhandle Public Health District urges caution when encountering unknown domestic or wild animals. As of June 6th, 32 positive cases of animal rabies have been identified in Nebraska. This has already surpassed the 35 confirmed cases for all of 2011.

Ten of the confirmed cases to-date originate in the Panhandle and include eight skunks, a cat and a raccoon. Statewide cases have been confirmed in skunks, bats, cattle, cats, foxes, raccoons, and dogs. In Nebraska, skunks and bats are the main sources and the most common animal species testing positive for rabies.

The risk of exposure to rabies is real, but the disease is preventable in both humans and domestic animals. Domestic pets and livestock can be infected from exposure to wildlife.

PPHD Surveillance Coordinator Becky Corman reinforces the importance of rabies vaccinations. "Have your veterinarian vaccinate your dogs, cats, ferrets, horses, and valuable livestock against rabies. Booster vaccinations as directed are also important to make sure they are protected."

Other tips to prevent rabies include:

- If bitten by an animal, seek medical attention and report the bite to your local public health department or animal control authorities immediately.
- If your animal is bitten, contact your veterinarian for an appointment for the animal to be examined.
- Do not handle, or feed wild animals. Never adopt wild animals or bring them into your home.
- If wild animals appear sick or injured, call animal control authorities or an animal rescue agency for assistance.
- Teach children never to handle unfamiliar animals, wild or domestic, even if they appear friendly.

If you have additional questions, please contact your veterinarian, the Panhandle Public Health Department at 308-262-2217, or the Scotts Bluff County Health Department at 308-436-6600. The purpose of the Panhandle Public Health District is to educate the region it serves about the prevention of epidemics, spread of contagious diseases, injury, illness and disability. The district is charged with promoting and encouraging healthy behaviors. They promote the quality and accessibility of health services and protection against environmental hazards. Through education, protection and promotion of these issues, the Panhandle Public Health District believes the quality of life of the residents they serve can be greatly improved.