



Hart County Health Department

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Banks, Dawson, Forsyth, Franklin, Habersham, Hall, Hart, Lumpkin, Rabun, Stephens, Towns, Union and White Counties

AVOID WILD OR STRAY ANIMALS TO REDUCE POSSIBLE EXPOSURE TO RABIES

Hart County Environmental Health was recently notified of a situation where a stray brown tabby cat scratched several people and was acting aggressive **near the intersection of Reed Creek Hwy and Boleman Hill Rd**. The cat later tested positive for rabies. The rabid cat could have potentially exposed other unvaccinated animals such as feral cats/kittens in the area.

Feral cats, unlike stray domesticated cats are born in the wild and should be treated as wild animals. **Do not attempt to capture or feed feral or unfamiliar cats**, leave them alone. If you feed your pets outside, please be sure to pick up any uneaten food so wild animals, including feral cats, will not be attracted to your property.

Incidences of animal rabies in our area are common and residents should take precautions to protect themselves and their pets. The following are symptoms of rabies that you should watch for in any domestic animal:

- Animal stops eating or drinking
- Animal becomes unusually vicious towards owners or others
- Animal walks with a sluggish gait or even sideways
- Animal constantly slobbers from the mouth
- Animal displays strange or unexplainable behavior

People should always avoid contact with unfamiliar dogs, cats, and wild animals. This includes feeding or attempting to help an animal that appears injured. **Maintaining current rabies vaccinations for your pets and keeping them away from wild animals is the best way to protect them.**

Rabies is transmitted when the virus is introduced into bite wounds, open cuts in the skin, or onto mucous membranes, such as the eyes or mouth. The virus enters the central nervous system of the host causing an inflammation of the brain that is almost always fatal. The most common carriers of rabies in the United States are raccoons, skunks, coyotes, foxes and bats.



Exposure to rabies is treatable by prompt care to the wound and appropriate post-exposure medicines. Prompt medical attention is very important, however, as rabies is almost always fatal without it.

Public health officials become involved in animal cases where exposure or potential exposure to rabies occurs. The role of public health is to ensure that domestic animals are vaccinated against rabies and to ensure the public is educated and informed about rabies. In many counties, public health is also responsible for collecting specimens from suspected rabid animals and coordinating testing of the specimen with the state lab. Additionally, public health officials notify individuals who have been exposed to risks and inform them of the need to seek medical care.

There is no better time than now to ensure that all of your pets are currently vaccinated. For more information about rabies, ask your veterinarian, local health department or go to the website <http://dph.georgia.gov/rabies>.

If you have questions about rabies please contact the Hart County Environmental Health Office at 706-376-5118 or 706-371-6600.