GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH
District 2 Public Health

District 2 Public Health
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Banks, Dawson, Forsyth, Franklin, Habersham, Hall, Hart, Lumpkin, Rabun, Stephens, Towns, Union and White Counties

Rabies Prevention Information

What is Rabies?

Rabies is a viral infection transmitted in the saliva of infected mammals. The virus enters the central nervous system of the host causing an inflammation of the brain that is almost always fatal.

How is rabies transmitted?

The most common carriers of rabies in the United States are raccoons, skunks, coyotes, foxes and bats. Wildlife remains the most likely potential source of infection for both humans and domestic animals in the United States. Rabies is transmitted only when the virus is introduced into bite wounds, open cuts in the skin, or onto mucous membranes, such as the eyes or mouth.

How can rabies be prevented?

- **People should avoid contact with unfamiliar dogs, cats, and wild animals.**
- Do NOT feed or attempt to help an injured animal.
- Maintain current rabies vaccinations for your pets.
- Keep your pets away from wild animals.
- Feed your pets inside, if you must feed your pets outdoors, pick up uneaten food.
- **Do not** attempt to capture or feed feral or stray cats.
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Rabies Treatment

Prompt treatment is needed if a person has had contact with an infected animal. Rabies is fatal without treatment. A post-exposure rabies vaccine is available through all major hospitals within District 2. Vaccine cost assistance is available, information can be obtained through your local Environmental Health Office.

Feral vs. Stray Domesticated Cats

A **feral cat** is not socialized to people and survives outdoors. They are wary of people and cannot be adopted. They act more like wild animals than a domesticated cat. They may be aggressive and lash out if threatened or cornered. They will always keep their distance from humans.

A **stray cat** has been socialized to people, but left or lost their indoor home. They may be friendly and approach a human, car, or porch/garage. They can become feral as their contact with humans lessens.

Wild Animal Regulations

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources has rigid regulations that prohibit the keeping of wild and wild/domestic hybrid animals as pets. For more information about wild animals visit: http://www.georgiawildlife.com

Common wild animals that are carriers of rabies and are prohibited to keep as pets include:

- Racoons
- Skunks
- Coyotes
- Foxes
- Bats

Role of Public Health to prevent rabies in communities

Public health officials become involved in animal cases when exposure or potential exposure occurs. Public health ensures that domestic animals are vaccinated against rabies and keeps the public informed about rabies risks and when and how to seek medical treatment.