



Baca County Public Health Agency

741 Main Street, Suite #4

Springfield, CO 81073

Tel: 719-523-6621 Fax: 719-523-6537

Rabies Press Release

With summer here, and more people enjoying the outdoors it is important to make sure that you are taking all of the right precautions. Here in Southeastern Colorado one of those concerns is rabies. Let's start with the question, "What is rabies?" Rabies is a virus that infects the central nervous system, ultimately causing disease in the brain and death. Rabies is most often transmitted through the bite of a rabid animal, with the majority of rabies cases occurring in wild animals like raccoons, skunks, bats, and foxes.

So far in 2016, 23 rabid animals have been confirmed in Colorado, one of the confirmed cases was in Baca County. These numbers reflect only animals that have been tested because they were acting strangely or were in contact with people, pets or livestock. Likely, there are many more infected animals that have not been tested. "As weather gets warmer and animals become more active, we are seeing an increase in the number of rabid animals," said Dr. Jennifer House, public health veterinarian at the department. "The presence of rabid animals in densely populated areas is a concern. Check your records to make sure pets are up to date on their rabies vaccines, and keep your pets from getting close to wildlife."

Rabies is a virus, and most Colorado rabies cases are found in skunks and bats. Rabies also affects other wildlife, pets and livestock, increasing the risk to humans.

"It's important to have all dogs and cats vaccinated to be protected from rabies," House said. "The vaccine prevents pets from getting rabies from wildlife and possibly exposing someone in your home. An unvaccinated pet is a risk to your whole family. It happens – two cats in Colorado got rabies last year."

Since it's hard to know if livestock have been exposed to rabid animals, House recommends horse, cattle and other livestock owners discuss rabies vaccinations with their veterinarians.

Animals with rabies often behave strangely. Rabid wildlife may come out in the daytime when they normally come out only at night. They also may approach or attack people, pets or livestock instead of avoiding them. Rabid animals may have trouble walking, flying, eating and drinking because the virus affects the nervous system. The only way to know for sure if an animal has rabies is to test it for the virus. Anyone who has had contact with wildlife or found a bat in their home should contact their local public health agency to find out what to do to prevent rabies.

If you see or come in contact with strange-acting animals, report that to the state or local health department. Public health agencies will test animals that act strangely or come into contact with people, pets or livestock.