

IREDELL COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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HEALTH DIRECTOR



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Iredell County Health Department

MEDIA RELEASE

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Rabies Cases on the Rise in Iredell County

Rabies cases are appearing more often in Iredell County, making it likely you or someone you know could come in contact with a rabid animal. In fact, there have been over triple the amount of rabies cases reported this year, sixteen positive cases compared to last year's five positive cases. An animal infected with the rabies virus can appear completely normal and maintain a friendly nature to a stranger. Rabies does not typically appear as an aggressive, mouth-foaming beast as often portrayed in Hollywood movies. A stumbling animal that appears drunk and acting unusual could be in the later stage the virus. For example, unusual behavior would be wildlife seen approaching people.

Rabies virus affects the nervous system and travels to the brain. For this reason, if you suspect a rabid animal (and need to dispatch with a firearm) be sure to preserve (keep intact) brain and spinal cord as much as possible. Testing for rabies can only be done if cranial (head/brain matter) evidence is not destroyed. This is especially important if your family pet or livestock come in contact with or is bitten by another animal or wildlife. It's important to protect domestic and livestock animals as much as possible from potential rabies exposure. All dogs, cats, ferrets are required to be vaccinated against rabies virus four months of age, and it is recommended that livestock are also vaccinated. A person may contract rabies through a bite, a small scratch, and even handling an infected animal. Bats (one of the most common sources of rabies) can bite or scratch without showing a mark on the skin because of the small size of teeth. If you find yourself in close proximity to a bat, dead or alive, DO NOT touch, hit, or destroy it and DO NOT remove it from your home. Bats that are on the ground, unable to fly or active during the day are more likely than others to be rabid.

Contact Animal Control at 704 878-5335 for any suspicious animal. This animal will be held under review by professionals that can recognize the virus, if applicable. Rabies post-exposure vaccines are painful and costly. Rabies can be prevented with proper animal vaccination practices.

Recommendation to help prevent the spread of rabies:

- If you are bitten or come in contact with an unfamiliar animal or wildlife ACT FAST, wash wound IMMEDIATELY, seek medical attention by a physician and contact Animal Control. If at all possible, contain the animal that bit you or at least be able to try to identify it to authorities.
- If a bat is in your home, do not release the bat outdoors until after speaking to a public health official. It may be possible to test the bat and avoid the need to receive rabies treatment.
- If you wake up to a bat in the room you may need to seek treatment if that bat cannot be located for testing.
- Keep vaccinations up-to-date for all dogs, cats, ferrets and livestock.

Central Office
318 Turnersburg Hwy
Statesville, NC 28625
704 878-5300

Mooresville Office
610 E. Center Avenue
Mooresville, NC 28115
704 664-5281

Environmental Health
349 N. Center Street
Statesville, NC 28677
704 878-5358

- Seek immediate veterinary assistance for your pet if it has come in contact with wildlife, or exposed to a bat.
- Never adopt wild animals, bring them into your home, or try to nurse sick, wild animals back to health.
- Do not touch, feed or unintentionally attract wild animals with open garbage cans.
- If you must feed your pet outdoors, be sure to only put the amount your pet would eat for one meal to avoid attracting other wildlife to feeding site.
- Teach children to never handle unfamiliar animals, wild or domestic, even if they appear friendly.
- Maintain homes and other buildings so bats cannot get inside.

Contact the North Carolina Wildlife Helpline at 866 318-2401 for general information about wildlife or their behavior, ways to detour wildlife from your property and wildlife control agents and rehabilitators.

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