

Texas Department of State Health Services
NEWS RELEASE
July 26, 2011

DSHS Urges Precautions to Avoid Rabies Exposure

The Texas Department of State Health Services is urging precautions to reduce the risk of contracting rabies. There has been a higher than usual number of animal rabies cases in Texas this year, particularly in Central Texas and the North Texas region. Protect yourself by avoiding wild animals and animals acting strangely, and by vaccinating your family pets.

The Central Texas region is seeing a marked increase in animal rabies cases, particularly in skunks. For the first six months of this year there were 268 rabies cases compared to 109 during the same time frame last year (January to June 30, 2010). Similarly, the North Texas region is seeing an increase, with 151 cases in the first half of 2011 compared with 81 cases in the first half of last year.

The state is seeing an overall increase in animal rabies cases as well. For the first six months of this year there were 591 animal rabies cases compared to 387 cases for the first six months of 2010.

Bats and skunks are the most common animals found to have rabies in Texas. People can be exposed to rabies by an animal bite or scratch that breaks the skin or if an open wound comes in direct contact with an infected animal's saliva. People also can be exposed if the saliva from a rabid animal gets in a person's eyes, nose, or mouth.

The most effective ways to prevent exposure to rabies are:

- Avoid feeding, touching or adopting wild animals, such as bats, skunks, raccoons and foxes
- Report suspicious animals to local animal control.
- Vaccinate your family pets or livestock against rabies.
- If you are bitten or if saliva from a suspected rabid animal comes in contact with your eyes, nose, mouth or a wound, wash the exposure site and seek medical attention immediately.

Rabies is almost always fatal in humans once symptoms occur. However, a series of post-exposure shots can prevent rabies if given in time.

For more information on rabies statistics, visit www.dshs.state.tx.us/idcu/disease/rabies/cases/statistics/.