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Increase in Rabies Cases in Animals

By: Jhoana Molina and Craig Levy, Maricopa County Public Health.

There has been an increase in the number of suspected rabies cases in Maricopa and Pinal Counties. The Maricopa County Department of Public Health (www.MCRabies.org) is urging residents to make sure that their dogs and cats are up-to-date on rabies vaccinations after three bats tested positive for rabies at the Arizona State Public Health Laboratory in the past two months.

In response to this rise in rabies cases, Pinal County's Animal Care and Control Department hosted a community meeting to cover the importance of rabies vaccinations and how to protect pets and livestock. They also hold many rabies vaccination clinics and check the schedule and location here <http://www.pinalcountyz.gov/AnimalControl/Pages/RabiesClinics.aspx>.

"We do not have a good explanation of why we are seeing more rabid animals than usual this year," said Craig Levy, epidemiologist for the Maricopa County Department of Public Health. "The best thing for residents to do is to make sure their animals are vaccinated against rabies and to be sure not to handle animals such as bats that could be carrying the virus."

This year, seven cases of animal rabies have been reported in Maricopa County; five rabid bats, one bobcat and one fox. Skunks are also an important rabies carrier. Four people have had to receive preventative rabies shots after being exposed to laboratory confirmed rabid animals, with others having been treated as a precautionary measure after being bitten or exposed to wild animals that were not available for testing. In 2016, Maricopa County had five cases of lab confirmed rabies cases in animals, including four bats and one coyote.

"Our concern is that the worst months may still be ahead." Levy added.

During the late summer and fall, the number of bat related exposures to people and pets tends to increase due to bat migration patterns. At this time, bats are migrating south and will sometimes stop and roost in places where people or pets may find them.

It is very important to leave these bats alone.

Levy explains "We have had too many incidents over the years where individuals have handled live or dead bats thinking it is safe to do so. Many of these people had to receive rabies shots. If your pet has had contact with a bat, be sure to contact your local animal control office which could be located in your city's jurisdiction or Maricopa County."

Domestic animals such as cats and dogs should be vaccinated against rabies. Horses and cows can also be vaccinated. Consult your local veterinarian for more information.

Rabies is caused by a virus that infects the central nervous system, including the spinal cord and brain, of animals and humans. It is caused by a virus present in the saliva of infected animals and is transmitted to humans through contact with the live virus. **Rabies is nearly always fatal once symptoms appear. Anyone who has had direct contact with a bat or other wild animals (especially foxes, skunks, and bobcats) should seek medical attention right away.**

In Arizona, rabies most commonly occurs in wild animals, such as bats, skunks and foxes, but any mammal can contract the disease. Rabid animals may show unusual behavior or appear unstable. Rabid carnivores, such as skunks, foxes, bobcats and coyotes may become aggressive and may attempt to bite people, pets and livestock.

Wild animals exhibiting unusual behavior should be reported to Arizona Game and Fish. Examples of unusual behavior include: wild animals that show no fear of people and pets; nocturnal animals that are active in daylight; and bats found on the ground, in swimming pools or that have been caught by a pet.

Recommended precautions against rabies:

- Keep people and pets away from wild animals. Do not pick up, touch, or feed wild or unfamiliar animals, especially sick or wounded ones. If someone has been bitten or scratched, or has had contact with the animal, report it immediately to animal control or health officials.
- Do not “rescue” seemingly abandoned young wild animals. Usually, the mother will return. If the mother is dead or has not returned in many hours, call the Arizona Game and Fish Department.
- Spay or neuter your pets to help reduce the number of unwanted pets that may not be properly cared for or vaccinated regularly.
- Vaccinate all dogs and cats against rabies. Pets should be kept on a leash or in a fenced yard when outside the home.
- Take precautions when camping, hunting or fishing. Avoid sleeping on the open ground without the protection of a closed tent or camper. Keep pets on a leash and do not allow them to wander.
- Do not disturb roosting bats. They will usually leave after nightfall.
- If you find a bat on the ground, **don't touch it**. If it is safe to do so, cover the bat with a box or container so animals do not make contact with the bat. Report the bat and its location to your local animal control officer or health department. If a person or pet has come into contact with the bat, it will need to be tested for rabies. Be careful not to damage the bat in any way since it must be intact for rabies testing.

For more information about rabies in Maricopa County, please visit www.MCRabies.org.

For more information about rabies and Vaccination Clinics in Pinal County, please visit <http://www.pinalcountyyaz.gov/AnimalControl/Pages/RabiesClinics.aspx>.

Webinars and Events

Please join in for the [2017 All Bugs Good and Bad Webinar Series](#). This webinar series provides information about good and bad insects. Webinars are free and open to everyone. Webinars will be on the **first Friday of each month at 2 p.m. Eastern time**.

Upcoming webinars include:

1. New Invasive Ants to Know About - October 6, 2017
2. Pantry Pests, Carpet Beetles, and Clothes Moths - November 3, 2017
3. Don't Let Bed Bugs Hamper Your Vacation Plans! - December 1, 2017

For more information about upcoming and past School IPM webinars:

<http://articles.extension.org/pages/74016/2017-all-bugs-good-and-bad-webinar-series>.

For more information about the EPA Schools program, visit:

<http://www.epa.gov/schools/>

For more information about Community IPM, visit:

<http://www.extension.org/pages/23359/urban-integrated-pest-management-community-page>



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For more information about School IPM in Arizona, visit:

<http://cals.arizona.edu/apmc/westernschoolIPM.html>

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