

For Immediate Release

January 18, 2023

First Positive Rabies Case in Wichita Falls in 2023

Wichita Falls, Texas- The City of Wichita Falls Animal Services Center encourages all pet owners and citizens to increase their awareness of rabies. On January 12, 2023, an Animal Care Officer responded to a call on the north side of Wichita Falls regarding a skunk out in daylight acting unusually (running in circles). The skunk was captured, euthanized, and sent for testing. The Health District received a positive rabies result today.

This is the first positive case in 2023; the first case in 2022 was in mid-November, also a skunk. Most wild animals are not infected with rabies, but residents should always keep in mind that wild animals, by nature, are unpredictable and can carry disease. Any exposure to wild animals, alive or dead, in particular, bats, raccoons, skunks, coyotes, and foxes (which are the top five carriers of the virus in Texas) should be avoided.

Children and pets should be watched closely while outdoors to ensure they do not come in contact with or touch wild animals. If a wild animal strays onto your property, bring children and pets indoors, alert anyone else who may be in the vicinity, and let the animal wander away.

Animal Services urges anyone who observes a wild or domestic animal appearing sick, fearless, aggressive, or other unusual behavior such as nocturnal animals out in the daylight) to contact Animal Control immediately at 940-761-7824. Do not attempt to capture or shoot the animal; it cannot be tested if shot in the head. Be aware that rabies can only be transmitted by saliva. Exposure may occur if one is scratched by an infected animal or whenever saliva enters an open cut or mucous membrane (nose, mouth, eyes).

Rabies is 100% preventable by following a few important guidelines:

- Ensure all pets: dogs, cats, and ferrets are current on their rabies vaccinations, as required by Texas State Law. Livestock owners are also encouraged to vaccinate horses and other livestock.
- Don't let pets roam free.
- Stay away from all wild animals and unknown dogs and cats.
- Avoid wild animals-even if they appear friendly.
- Never coax a wild animal to eat from your hand.
- If you encounter a bat, do not handle it. Bats have extremely small teeth, and you may not realize that you have been bitten.

- Teach your children to report all bites, scratches, and encounters with a wild or unknown animal.

To reduce the risk of exposure to rabies from wildlife, we recommend the following:

- Don't feed or water your pets outside. Even empty bowls will attract wild and stray animals. If you are feeding feral cats, feed early in the day and do not leave food out overnight, as that will also attract wild animals.
- Keep your garbage securely covered. Open garbage will attract wild or stray animals.
- Wild animals should not be kept as pets.
- Enjoy all wild animals from a distance and teach children never to handle unfamiliar animals – even if they appear friendly.

If someone has been bitten or scratched by an unfamiliar or wild animal, contact a physician or the Wichita Falls

- Wichita County Public Health District for immediate assistance. Also, contact the City of Wichita Falls Animal Services Center at 940-761-7824 to make a report.

Animal Services also discourages pet owners from purchasing or taking “free” animals, especially puppies and kittens, from people trying to sell or give them away on the side of the road or in parking lots. Domesticated animals can be quarantined for a period of time for rabies observation and wildlife will be euthanized and sent to the Department of State Health Services for rabies testing.

Any concerns with possible contact with a potential rabies exposure can be directed to Animal Control at 940- 761-7824. For more information, please contact Animal Services at 940-761-8894.

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