



MEDIA RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Six dogs euthanized after fight with rabid raccoon

Blue Ridge (GA) Tuesday, June 3, 2008 ~ A woman witnessed three of her neighbor's dogs killing a raccoon on the neighbor's property off Old Loving Road in Morganton on Friday, May 23. At the same time, she saw three more of the owner's dogs in a nearby pasture. The raccoon has now tested positive for rabies, and because none of the six dogs involved were vaccinated for rabies, it was determined by public health officials that all would have to be euthanized. Even though three of the dogs were not observed directly touching the raccoon, it was deemed too risky to assume that the dogs may not have been exposed to the animal at some point.

All six of the dogs have now been euthanized.

As soon as it was confirmed that the raccoon had been rabid, county environmental health staff canvassed the neighborhood with flyers informing residents of the incident, and they continue to urge the public to make certain their pets and livestock are current on their rabies vaccinations.

"It's always very difficult to have to tell a person that their unvaccinated pet was potentially exposed to rabies and they must now make the tough decision to either have that pet undergo a very expensive, prolonged quarantine or have it put down." said Monica Hodskins of the Fannin County Environmental Health Department. "It's particularly sad knowing that it could have been so easily avoided had their pet been vaccinated."

By vaccinating domestic animals against rabies, a buffer of protection is built between humans and rabies in the wild. Vaccinated pets will not become rabid and expose their owners to this fatal disease. Unvaccinated pets that are exposed to rabies present a potential danger to the public, so they are usually euthanized.

Anytime a human, pet or livestock is directly exposed to a possibly rabid animal, immediately call the Fannin County Environmental Health office at (706) 632-3024. If the incident occurs after office hours or over the weekend, please follow these procedures:

- Call Fannin County Environmental Health office, listen to the full voice message

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that includes the number for the Georgia Poison Center, and leave a message at the beep with all the details of the incident.

- Report the incident to Georgia Poison Center at 1-800-282-5846. If the dead body of the potentially rabid animal is available, they will advise on how to handle the remains until they can be turned over to authorities for testing. That advice includes:
 - o Guard against accidental exposure to the animal's claws or teeth by wearing high-cuffed, heavy-duty gloves and long, thick sleeves
 - o Place the body in doubled plastic bags
 - o Either place the body on ice in a cooler or put it in a refrigerator
- If even the possibility of a human exposure exists, call 911.

Other immediate steps to take if bitten by an unfamiliar or possibly rabid animal would be to thoroughly wash the wound with soap and water and seek immediate medical attention. If a pet is bitten, seek veterinary assistance right away. The health care provider and/or veterinarian will need to know the following to assess the risk of rabies exposure:

- o The type of animal that was involved
- o How the exposure occurred (provoked or unprovoked)
- o The vaccination status of the animal (if known)
- o Whether the animal can be safely captured and tested for rabies
- o The geographic location of the incident

For more information about rabies, please call your local county environmental health office at the number mentioned above or log onto the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at www.cdc.gov.

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