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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Springtime Increases the Risk of Rabies

Sterling, Colo. – April 20, 2022: As springtime temperatures begin to rise, so do the rabies cases in northeast Colorado. Because wildlife begins to move around and babies are leaving the nest or den, there is more potential for contact with humans in urban areas. With this interaction, rabies becomes a serious threat to domesticated animals and to people; and if untreated it can also be deadly. To prevent the risks of contracting this dangerous disease, stay away from any wild animal, even if it appears to be friendly, and be sure your livestock and pets are vaccinated against rabies.

In northeast Colorado, the most common carriers of rabies are skunks, raccoons, bats and foxes. However, it is a viral disease that can affect the central nervous system of any warm-blooded animal, including domesticated animals such as dogs, cats, goats and, although rare, humans. Since rabies is spread by contact with the saliva of the infected animal, generally through a bite, it can also be spread through a scratch, lick or an existing open wound. There is no cure for rabies once clinical signs occur; it is almost always fatal and infected animals will usually die within five days.

“The rabies virus is almost always fatal when contracted by humans and animals,” states Tammy Hort, Disease Control Specialist for Northeast Colorado Health Department. “To
protect yourself from possible rabies exposure, stay away from wildlife (including bats),
do not approach any animal that appears to be sick or injured, vaccinate your pets. If
you are bitten by an animal (domesticated or wild), contact your physician and local
animal control right away."

The time between the bite and the appearance of symptoms is called the incubation
period and for rabies it varies broadly. In humans, it is typically between three to eight
weeks, although incubation periods as short as four days and longer than six years have
been documented. This variance depends on several factors, including the location of
the entry wound, the severity of the wound and the animal’s immune system. In general,
the farther the wound is from the brain, the severity of the infection and the immunity
strength of the host; the longer the incubation period will be.

Rabies is a neurological disease. Therefore, early signs of infection will be unusual
behavior such as unfounded aggression and anxiety, where the animal is actively trying
to bite, while other animals may act timid or shy. A wild animal might move slowly or act
tame, allowing you to get close to it. Astonishingly enough, this type of behavior is most
common. Since we all know that is not the way wild animals usually act, you should
remember that something could be wrong. As the disease progresses, animals develop
hypersensitivity to light and sound. They may also have seizures and/or become
extremely vicious. The final stage of rabies is typified by paralysis of the nerves that
control the head and throat — the animal will hypersalivate and lose the ability to
swallow. As the paralysis progresses, the animal eventually goes into respiratory failure
and dies.

“Although peoples’ intentions are good, they can be hurtful towards seemingly lost or
hurt animals,” says Northeast Colorado Health Department Environmental Health
Manager, Mel Bustos “Please do not try and rescue wildlife or keep it for a possible pet.
State and federal laws protect nearly all wild animals and birds. It is against the law to possess the animal or bird or the nests, feathers, or eggs of a bird without special permits. High fines and possible jail time are often given. In addition, dietary needs of each species of animal are different and it is almost impossible to duplicate their needs in captivity without special training. They might be cute, but they belong in the wild.”

Unfortunately, there is no way to test for rabies infection in a live animal. Testing is done by examining the brain tissue of a diseased animal. So, the best protection from rabies, and to save the life of an uninfected wild animal would be to follow these steps:

• Avoid direct contact with all wildlife and animals that are acting strange.

• Don’t touch a wild animal, dead or alive, with your bare hands.

• Let the experts handle it if you find a lost, sick or injured animal. Call your local animal control agency or humane society.

• Don’t keep wild animals as pets. Exotic animals cannot be vaccinated against rabies.

• Discourage contact between pets and wildlife.

• VACCINATE YOUR PETS! Keep pet and livestock vaccinations up to date.

• If you or your pet receives a scratch or bite from an unknown animal contact your physician or veterinarian immediately. If the animal is a pet, ask the owner to provide proof of rabies vaccination.

So as the seasons change and we come in contact more with wildlife, remember that these simple steps can prevent you, your livestock and your pet from becoming infected with rabies and in the process save the life of a wild animal.

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WE ARE NOT PETS.

Good intentions can hurt. Leave Wildlife in the wild.