

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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VACCINATE PETS TO PREVENT RABIES

(CHRISTIANSBURG, Va.) – In recognition of Rabies Awareness Week, Sept. 24-30, 2012, the New River Health District and area veterinarians urge all Virginians to vaccinate their pet dogs and cats and to keep those vaccinations current, as required by Virginia law, and to take precautions to prevent the spread of rabies. (Rabies vaccine also is available for ferrets and some livestock. Please check with your veterinarian.)

So far this year in the New River Health District (Floyd, Giles, Montgomery and Pulaski counties and the City of Radford), 28 animals have been confirmed to be rabid. District staff has investigated 443 potential rabies exposure incidents and 44 people have been recommended to receive rabies post-exposure treatment.

The Virginia Department of Health partners with the Virginia Veterinary Medical Association to spread the word about the importance of rabies vaccine, which is available at local veterinarians' offices. Please check with your veterinarian for office hours and costs.

Rabies is a deadly disease caused by a virus that attacks the nervous system of mammals. Once symptoms develop it is almost always fatal. The rabies virus is mainly in the saliva and brain of rabid animals. It can be transmitted through a bite or by getting saliva or brain tissue in a wound; rarely by getting the virus in the eyes or mouth.

To help control rabies:

- Vaccinate your dogs, cats, ferrets and selected livestock and keep the vaccinations up-to-date;
- If your pet is attacked or bitten, especially by a wild animal, report it to the local health or animal control authorities. Be sure your vaccinated dog, cat, or ferret receives a booster vaccination;
- Limit the possibility of exposure by keeping your animals on your property. Don't let pets roam free;
- Do not leave garbage or pet food outside. It may attract wild or stray animals; and
- Do not keep wild animals as pets. Enjoy all wild animals from a distance, even if they seem friendly. A rabid animal sometimes acts tame. If you see an animal acting strangely, report it to your local animal control department and do not go near it yourself.

For more information, contact the New River Health District at 540-381-7100 or visit www.vdh.virginia.gov/Epidemiology/DEE/Rabies.