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Rabies Confirmed in Elbert County Cat

Tri-County Health Department has confirmed that a stray cat in Elbert County was infected with rabies. It was located in the vicinity of Cimarron and Stage Run neighborhoods, near Elizabeth. The normally tame long-haired gray and white cat named “Bob” was often fed by local residents, but was recently acting aggressively and had to be euthanized.

There was at least one known human exposure to the cat, and that person is receiving rabies vaccine. Local residents have been notified, but anyone who may have come in contact with the cat between May 15–25 is urged to call the Tri-County Health Department at 303-220-9200 (including after hours). People who have been exposed to rabies can receive medication to prevent illness.

“This rabies case stresses the importance of having dogs and cats vaccinated against rabies. Vaccination is an easy and effective way to protect pets and humans from this deadly disease,” states John M. Douglas, Jr., MD, Executive Director of Tri-County Health Department.

Rabies is caused by a virus that affects the nervous system of humans and other mammals, and is nearly always fatal. The virus is present in the saliva of infected animals. People or animals can get rabies from the bite or scratch of a rabid animal or from a rabid animal’s saliva if it comes in contact with their eyes, nose, mouth or open wounds.

A rabies epidemic in skunks is ongoing in the eastern counties of Colorado. This year, in Colorado, 29 animals have already tested positive including 25 skunks, 2 bats, 1 raccoon, and 1 cat from El Paso County. Cats, dogs and livestock are at particular risk of being bitten by ground dwelling, rabid skunks. The best way to protect domestic animals is by vaccination.

There are two types of rabies symptoms: “furious” and “dumb.” Furious rabies symptoms include combativeness and unusual aggressive behavior, such as biting. In the “dumb” form of the disease, the animal is lethargic, weak in one or more limbs, and unable to raise its head or

make sounds because its throat and neck muscles are paralyzed. Wildlife suffering from rabies can be out during the day, act aggressively and violently approach people or pets. Rabid wildlife might also stumble or have trouble walking.

In addition to rabies vaccinations for pets and livestock, there are additional precautions to prevent possible exposure to rabies:

- Do not feed or touch wild animals or allow your pets around them. Avoid leaving pet food outside, as that may attract a wild animal or stray pet.
- Teach children to stay away from all wild animals, stray domestic pets, or any dead animals and tell an adult if they are scratched or bitten.
- Do not let pets roam freely, since this can increase the chance that they could be bitten by a wild animal without your knowledge.
- Contact your veterinarian if your dog or cat is bitten or scratched by a wild animal.
- Contact your health care provider right away if you have been bitten or scratched by a wild animal and report the incident to Tri-County Health Department 303-220-9200.
- If you see a sick wild animal, call the Colorado Parks and Wildlife office at 303-297-1192 or local law enforcement at 303-660-7500.

If you have general questions about rabies, call the statewide public health information line at 1-877-462-2911. More information about rabies is available at www.tchd.org/396/Animal-Bites-Rabies

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