



GAME AND FISH NEWS

June 20, 2018
Arizona Game and Fish Department

ADHS reminds residents to take precautions to prevent rabies

Increase in rabies cases reported in several Arizona counties



Although human exposures to rabies are not common, always enjoy wildlife from a distance.

PHOENIX — Outdoor recreationists and other members of the public are reminded, as always, to enjoy wildlife from a distance.

The Arizona Department of Health Services on June 19 issued a news release advising that there has been a statewide rise in animal rabies cases and encouraging the community to follow prevention guidelines to stay safe from the disease. According to ADHS, as of May 31, 2018, there have been 77 rabid animals reported this year compared with 54 at the same time last year, with the majority of animals identified in rural counties in the state. Most rabid animals

identified to date in 2018 have been skunks and foxes, with 25 rabid skunks and 31 positive foxes reported from January through May. An increase in rabid bats is expected as the weather gets warmer.

“Rabies is a very serious disease that can be fatal, so it is important for people to take precautions such as keeping their pets on a leash and vaccinated against the disease,” said Dr. Cara Christ, director of the Arizona Department of Health Services. “People can still walk, hike, or camp in areas where there are reported cases of rabies, but it is critical to make sure you and your pets are not interacting with wild animals. When at home, pets should be supervised or kept in a fenced yard.”

Rabies is a virus spread by the bite of or contact with saliva of an infected animal. Rabies causes severe damage to the central nervous system and usually leads to death once symptoms appear. Human exposures to rabid animals are usually rare (and can be treated through prompt administration of anti-rabies vaccine and rabies immune globulin), but domestic animals, such as cats and dogs, often come into contact with wild animals and are at an increased risk.

“In Arizona, bats, skunks, and foxes are the main animal sources of rabies,” said Anne Justice-Allen, D.V.M., a veterinarian and wildlife health specialist for the Arizona Game and Fish Department. “The first sign of rabies is usually a change in the animal's behavior. Animals may act more aggressive or more tame than usual, be out during the day, stagger, tremble, or seem weak. Rabid animals may appear agitated and excited or paralyzed and frightened. Sometimes, rabid animals do not show any signs of illness before death from rabies.”

To prevent rabies and other diseases spread by animals (such as plague and tularemia), ADHS and AZGFD advise that people should not touch or feed wild or unfamiliar animals, even if they do not appear sick or aggressive. Any wild animal exhibiting unusual, erratic, or aggressive behavior should be reported to local animal control officials or the Arizona Game and Fish Department at (602) 942-3000. If you or your pet is bitten or has contact with a wild animal, seek immediate medical or veterinary attention and contact your county public health department.

For more information on rabies, go online to www.azhealth.gov/rabies.

Did you know?

The Arizona Game and Fish Department conserves and protects Arizona's 800+ wildlife species but receives NO Arizona general fund tax dollars. Contribute to our on-the-ground conservation efforts at www.AzWildlifeHero.com.

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