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John Teel, Director

Public Health News Release Increase in Animal Rabies Cases in Grayson County

The following information has been gathered from the Texas Department of State and Health Services (DSHS), and the Grayson County Health Department's Animal Control Division. The Grayson County Health Department's Public Health Preparedness Team would like to report the following information:

The Texas Department of State Health Services is urging precautions to reduce the risk of contracting rabies. There has been a higher than usual number of animal rabies cases in Texas this year, particularly in Central Texas and the North Texas region. Protect yourself by avoiding wild animals and animals acting strangely, and by vaccinating your family pets against rabies.

The Central Texas region is seeing a marked increase in animal rabies cases, particularly in skunks. For the first eight months of this year there were 740 rabies cases compared to 522 during the same time frame last year (January to August 31, 2010). Similarly, the North Texas region is seeing an increase, with 151 rabid animals reported in the first half of 2011 compared with 81 cases in the first half of last year.

As of September 30, 2011, Grayson County has had 10 skunks and one kitten test positive for rabies. Only two of the 11 total cases involved human exposure. Those individuals who were potentially exposed to the rabies virus from contact with the rabid kitten received the series of post-exposure rabies vaccinations. No human case of rabies has been reported in Grayson County.

Bats and skunks are the most common animals found to have rabies in Texas. People can be exposed to rabies by an animal bite or scratch that breaks the skin or if an open wound comes in direct contact with an infected animal's saliva. People also can be exposed if the saliva from a rabid animal gets in a person's eyes, nose, or mouth.

The most effective ways to prevent exposure to rabies are:

- **Avoid feeding, touching or adopting wild animals, such as bats, skunks, raccoons and foxes**
- **Report suspicious animals to local animal control (for example, skunks, bats, raccoons, or foxes active during daylight hours, or which appear sick)**
- **Vaccinate your family pets and livestock against rabies**
- **If you are bitten or if saliva from a suspected rabid animal comes in contact with your eyes, nose, mouth or a wound, wash the exposure site and seek medical attention immediately.**

Rabies is almost always fatal in humans once symptoms occur. However, a series of post-exposure shots can prevent rabies if given in time. For additional information about animal rabies, contact Grayson County's Environmental Health Division at 903 465-2878, extension 243.