**PRESS RELEASE**

**Rabid Animals Serve as Reminder for the Importance of Pet Vaccination**

A skunk in Thomas County has tested positive for rabies. This is the fourth animal that has tested positive for rabies in Thomas County for 2019; two skunks and one cow tested positive for rabies previously. Rabies is a fatal viral disease in people and animals. People or animals can become infected with the rabies virus from a bite by a rabid animal or when saliva from the rabid animal comes into contact with the eyes, inside the mouth, or an open wound.

The risk for human exposure to rabies is real, but preventable. Animal rabies is common in Kansas and skunks are the animals most likely to have the disease. However, skunks can pass the virus to other animals and those animals can then pass the virus to people. People may not realize that bats can have rabies too. Prevention of human rabies depends on maintaining an adequate buffer zone of vaccinated domestic animals, eliminating human exposures to stray and wild animals, and providing exposed persons with prompt post-exposure rabies treatment.

The Thomas County Health Department wants to remind everyone who owns pets and livestock to make sure their animals are vaccinated against rabies by their veterinarian. Vaccines are available for dogs, cats, ferrets, horses, cattle, and sheep. Vaccinated animals need to have periodic boosters of vaccine to maintain proper protection.

Thirty-five cases of animal rabies have been reported in Kansas in 2019. The rabid animals included 22 skunks, five bats, three cats, one cow, one dog, one horse, one raccoon, and one sheep.

**Thomas County Health Department offers these tips to prevent rabies:**

* Have your veterinarian vaccinate all dogs, cats, ferrets, horses and valuable breeding stock (cattle and sheep) against rabies.
* If bitten by an animal, seek medical attention and report the bite to your local health department or animal control department immediately.
* If your animal is bitten, contact your veterinarian for advice.
* If you wake up in a room with a bat present, regardless if there is evidence of a bite or scratch, seek medical attention. If at all possible, trap the bat for testing. Do not release the bat.
* Do not handle or feed wild animals. Never adopt wild animals or bring them into your home.
* Do not try to nurse sick wild animals to health. Call animal control or an animal rescue agency for assistance.
* Teach children never to handle unfamiliar animals, wild or domestic, even if they appear friendly.

For more information about rabies, contact your veterinarian or the Thomas County Health Department at 785-460-4596.