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State Confirms Rabies in Taos County Skunk Department of Health Reminds Public to Vaccinate Animals

(Santa Fe) The New Mexico Department of Health reported today that a skunk from the Peñasco area of Taos County tested positive for rabies. Rabies is a fatal disease if it is not treated before symptoms develop. The Department of Health recommends pet owners vaccinate their animals to protect them from rabies.

Two skunks, both from near the town of Taos, tested positive for rabies in summer and fall of 2007. Several people in Taos County have noticed an increase in skunks and skunk carcasses found along the road, said Dr. Paul Ettestad, the Department's public health veterinarian.

"Pet and horse owners need to protect their animals by having them up-to-date on their rabies vaccines. This will also protect your children and other family members from rabies if your dog or cat tangles with a rabid skunk," Ettestad said. "Animals that are not vaccinated and are bitten by a rabid animal can be dangerous and needlessly expose people to rabies before they die."

It is easy to prevent rabies by taking the following precautions:

- Do not handle wild animals. Feed your pets indoors and do not toss table scraps into your yard.
- Teach your children to stay away from wild animals or animals they don't know.
- If skunks or other wild animals are lurking around your yard and acting sick or abnormal contact your local animal control department.
- Supervise your pets to prevent exposure. Obey leash laws and keep your pets restrained.
- If another person's pet bites your pet, try to find the owner. Contact your local animal control department and call your veterinarian, even if the wound is superficial.

If you are bitten or scratched, follow these guidelines:

- Wash all wounds and contact areas thoroughly with soap and water.
- Contact your physician immediately for evaluation. The Department of Health is available to physicians for consultation about rabies 24/7/365 at 505-827-0006.
- Call the local animal control department to report the incident; provide them with an accurate description of the animal.
- Try to keep the animal confined, but don't risk further injury if the animal is dangerous.
- Keep children away from all animals involved.

For more information about rabies in New Mexico, check out the Department of Health's website: www.health.state.nm.us.