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## **Health Officials Warn About the Danger with Stray Animals**

May 9, 2017 - Health officials with the Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department are warning about the dangers of approaching unfamiliar animals including cats and dogs that look stray. These lovable animals can encounter wildlife outdoors and contract *rabies* if bitten.

*Rabies* is a viral disease that is transmitted through the saliva of an infected (rabid) animal, typically by biting. A person infected with *rabies* will show symptoms like the flu, and progress several days later with symptoms of brain dysfunction, confusion, anxiety, and agitation. Once symptoms begin, there is no treatment for rabies and rabies is fatal to humans if proper treatment is not received says the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

Per Michigan law, dogs are required to be licensed and vaccinated against the rabies virus after 4 months. However, not knowing if a dog, cat, or other domesticated animal has been vaccinated puts someone at risk immediately. "Dogs typically will have their license and rabies tags attached to their collar, so this is the first thing you should look for", says Tom Fountain, Director of Environmental Health for the Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department. "You should be very tentative and aware of the dog's behavior as a rabid dog can have symptoms of confusion, paralysis, seizures, and aggression", says Fountain.

If you are bitten by an animal (dog, cat or wild animal), note as much information as possible (color, breed, where it came from, etc..) so that Animal Control can try to locate the animal to verify that it does not have rabies. This is done by observing the animal for 10 days, and if it stays healthy we know it does not have rabies. If the animal is not able to be located, and therefore are not able to verify whether the animal is healthy, or not, health department nurses will help the family/individual to make the decision about starting rabies vaccination.

ANY animal bite that breaks the skin should be evaluated by a doctor. Animal bites can cause infection, so the wound will be cleansed and the person started on antibiotics. The doctor will also determine if the individual should receive a tetanus vaccine.

Wild animal bites should immediately be reported to the health department. We can determine whether the animal is one that may carry rabies, ensure that Animal Control is notified to find the animal, and provide guidance to the family on whether, or not, rabies vaccination is recommended.

For more information about *rabies*, contact the Environmental Health Unit at the Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department at 231- 882-2103, or go to [www.cdc.gov/rabies](http://www.cdc.gov/rabies).