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For Immediate Release
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Stay Safe Around Animals

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) reminds everyone to use caution around wild animals or animals you don't know. Animals can carry several diseases that are infectious to people, and sick animals may be more likely to bite or cause injuries.

Wild animals have the potential to carry rabies which can be passed on to humans by the bite or saliva of an infected animal. Rabies is a deadly viral infection that affects the nervous system of humans if not treated quickly after exposure. Rabies should be suspected in all animals that show a sudden change in behavior that is different from normal, such as animals normally active at night being seen during the day.

Be alert when around wild animals and do not approach them. Baby animals such as raccoons or opossums may be cute but should never be touched or handled. Bats are important bug eaters in Nebraska but are also a common carrier of rabies. Bats should always be treated with caution, especially if they need to be removed from human spaces. Trap and remove bats using containers and thick gloves to make sure there is no direct contact, or contact a professional to remove them.

After handling chickens, farm animals, or cattle, be sure to wash your hands thoroughly. These animals carry stomach illnesses such as campylobacter and salmonella that could make you very sick. Teach children to wash their hands after touching chicks or collecting eggs. Some reptiles that are kept as pets may also carry these illnesses, including turtles; all pet owners should practice good handwashing.

“Even animals that may look friendly should be treated with caution if you are unfamiliar with them,” explains Melissa Propp RN, Clinic Manager with SWNPHD. “Teaching your children about animal safety is extremely important to prevent any possible exposure to rabies or other illnesses.”

If you believe you had contact with a bat or other sick animal, contact your healthcare provider or the public health nurses at 308-345-4223 for more information and instructions. Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. You can follow SWNPHD on Facebook, TikTok, YouTube and Instagram or call 308-345-4223, one number three locations, McCook, Imperial, and Ogallala.

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