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For Immediate Release  
Contact: Melissa Propp, RN at 308-345-4223

### **Stay Safe Around Animals**

Spring is in the air and animals are out and about. Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) reminds everyone to use caution around wild animals or animals you do not know. Animals can carry several diseases that are infectious to people, and sick animals or mothers protecting babies may be more likely to bite or cause injuries.

“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 help prevent bites.”

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.

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, YouTube, and Instagram.

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