



MEMORANDUM

Date: January 25, 2018

To: The Honorable Chairman and Members
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: C.H. Huckelberry
County Administrator 

Re: **Rabies in Pima County Wildlife**

Recent media reports have suggested an increase in the number of Arizona residents encountering rabid wildlife across the state. These reports have generated inquiries from residents concerned about their own health and risk of exposure. This memorandum provides you some context for how this issue affects Pima County.

Rabies is a preventable viral disease most often transmitted through the bite of an infected animal. The rabies virus attacks the central nervous system, causing inflammation of the brain (encephalitis). It is nearly always fatal once symptoms appear.

Rabies can be prevented in persons who have come into contact with the oral secretions or have been bitten by wild animals through prompt administration of anti-rabies vaccine and anti-rabies serum. The decision to initiate this post exposure prophylaxis is based on a number of factors including: the type and circumstance of the exposure; the availability of biting animal for quarantine or testing; and the vaccination history when the incident involves a domestic animal. Once it has been determined that the patient should receive rabies PEP, it should begin *as soon as possible* after the exposure.

In Pima County, bats are the most common source of rabies exposures when people pick up or handle a sick or dead bat. Other rabies exposures occur when people try to approach or feed wild animals, or in rare cases when they are attacked by rabid foxes, coyotes, or skunks. Most rabies exposures can be prevented by simply leaving bats and other wild animals alone. The table below gives you a sense for how this infection has impacted our local wildlife.

Confirmed Positive Rabid Animals from Pima County

YEAR	Bats	Skunks	Foxes	Bobcat	Total
2018		1	1		2
2017	63	7	6	1	77
2016	51	13	3		67
2015	51	6			57
2014	62	10			72
2013	28	8		1	37

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The last domestic animal in Pima County to test positive for rabies was a dog in 2008. The last documented human rabies death in Arizona was in 1981.

The County's role in the prevention of human exposure to the rabies virus stems from the lethality of this infection. The Health Department and PACC are the primary Pima County departments that have responsibilities in this area. Jointly these entities are responsible for public education, pet vaccination, quarantine & testing of affected animals, human exposure risk assessment, and through the provision of technical support and consultation to clinicians serving community members who may be exposed.

The most critical recommendation from a policy and public health standpoint is to discourage direct human contact with wild life and to ensure pets are vaccinated for potential exposures. By following these two recommendations, the health and safety of all Pima County residents will be protected.

CHH/mp

c: Jan Leshar, Chief Deputy County Administrator
Francisco Garcia, Assistant County Administrator for Community and Health Services
Kristen Auerbach, Manager, Pima Animal Care Center
Marcy Flanagan, Director, Health Services