

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**CENTRAL VIRGINIA HEALTH DISTRICT ENCOURAGES CITIZENS TO
TAKE PRECAUTIONS TO PREVENT RABIES**

(Lynchburg, Va.)- Rabies is well-established in our area. It can be spread by any mammal, but is most often found in raccoons, skunks, foxes and bats. While people do sometimes come into direct contact with wild animals, the most likely way for them to be exposed to rabies is by bites from unvaccinated dogs or cats.

In Lynchburg City and the surrounding counties, rabies activity continues to be high. In the first six months of this year, Central Virginia Health District staff has investigated 338 cases of possible human rabies exposures. During the same time period tests confirmed active rabies infections in 13 animals while 22 people have had to take an expensive series of shots because they were exposed to rabies.

Exposure to bats is a serious concern. While most bats do not have rabies, their teeth are very sharp and a bite could go unnoticed. It is important that people do not handle bats! Anyone who does come into contact with a bat, or who awakens to find a bat in his/her bedroom, should contact the local health department, his/her doctor, or local animal control office immediately.

Remember, rabies is fatal unless treated before symptoms start. The best ways to protect your family are to:

- Vaccinate all dogs, cats and ferrets by four months of age, by a licensed veterinarian;
- Vaccinate large farm animals for rabies, particularly if they are handled extensively by humans;
- Enjoy wildlife at a distance and avoid contact with stray animals;
- Secure your yard and home and do not leave food laying out to attract wild animals;
- Do not allow your animals to roam free; and
- If you are bitten or exposed to rabies, wash the wound thoroughly with lots of warm water and soap and seek medical attention immediately.

For more information about rabies in Central Virginia contact the Environmental Health Department for Central Virginia Health District at 434-947-6781 or visit our website at <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/LHD/CentralVirginia/environmental/>.