



## NEWS RELEASE

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August 19, 2015

### **Health Officials Confirm First Rabies Case in Mississippi Land Animal in More Than 50 Years**

**JACKSON, Miss.** – Today the Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) confirms the first rabies case in a land animal in Mississippi since 1961. The case was identified in a feral cat in Starkville described as a small, black and white kitten.

Exposures to the rabid cat were reported in downtown Starkville and in a remote area in the general vicinity of developed portions of the Thad Cochran Research Park near the campus of Mississippi State University (MSU).

Testing of the cat's brain tissue at the Mississippi Public Health Laboratory confirmed that the cat was infected with rabies. Rabies is commonly found in bats in Mississippi and has been found in feral and wild animals in bordering states in previous years.

Health officials urge anyone who may have been bitten or scratched by a feral (wild) cat matching this description in either of these areas within the past 10 days to immediately contact their primary healthcare provider and the MSDH Office of Epidemiology at 601-576-7725. At this time there is no ongoing public health risk.

Rabies is a viral disease of mammals that is transmitted through the bite of an infected animal or through the contamination of a fresh wound with saliva from an infected animal. Rabies is completely preventable if post-exposure shots are administered after contact with a rabid animal.

Mississippians can help protect themselves against rabies by taking the following precautions:

- Do not handle or touch live or dead feral animals, animals you do not know, or wild animals such as raccoons, bats, skunks, foxes and coyotes that can carry rabies.
- If you see an animal acting strangely, contact your local Animal Control officials.
- Vaccinate animals when your dog or cat has reached 3 months of age, one year later, and every three years thereafter (using a vaccine approved with 3 year immunity), as required by state law.

The MSDH continues to work with local partners, including MSU and the Mississippi Board of Animal Health, to identify those who may have had contact with the infected cat, assess their risk of exposure, and provide recommendations for treatment.

For more information on rabies, visit the MSDH website at [HealthyMS.com/rabies](http://HealthyMS.com/rabies).

Follow MSDH by email and social media at [HealthyMS.com/connect](http://HealthyMS.com/connect).

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**CONTACT:** Office of Communications, 601-576-7667

**Note to media:** After hours or during emergencies, call 1-866-HLTHY4U (1-866-458-4948)

**Online:** [HealthyMS.com](http://HealthyMS.com) [facebook.com/HealthyMS](https://www.facebook.com/HealthyMS) [twitter.com/msdh](https://twitter.com/msdh)