Rabid Bull Reported in Central Illinois; Public Encouraged to Avoid Contact with Rabid Animals

First rabid domestic animal in Illinois since 2005

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Public Health and Illinois Department of Agriculture are reporting a bull testing positive for rabies. The bull was pastured in east Macon County and developed signs of rabies on Monday, Jan. 24, 2011. The owner did not report any known exposure to odd acting wild animals, but reported many wild animals are sighted on his property.

Rabies is a virus that affects the central nervous system. Of all Illinois wild animals, rabies is most common in bats. When skunk rabies virus is circulating, skunks, raccoons, foxes, and other wild animals can be affected. Cats, dogs and livestock can get rabies, too, if they are not rabies vaccinated.

If you see wild or domestic animals with signs of rabies, do not approach these animals and call the local animal control to report the sighting. The first sign of rabies is usually a change in the animal’s behavior. Animals don’t have to be “foaming at the mouth” to have rabies. Other signs include difficulty walking, a general appearance of sickness or a change in the animal’s normal behavior. Animal control should safely capture, euthanize and submit these animals for rabies testing.

Health and agriculture officials strongly encourage vaccination of domestic animals, including horses, dogs, cats and ferrets. Herd owners should consider rabies vaccination for valuable cattle.

People are usually exposed to the rabies virus when an infected animal bites them or they have direct exposure to saliva from the animal. People at high risk of rabies exposure, such as wildlife personnel, animal control officers and veterinarians and their staff, should consider being vaccinated for rabies.
The last human case of rabies reported in Illinois was in 1954.

The last domestic animal with rabies in the state was reported in 2005 in a cow that had been pastured in both Bureau and LaSalle counties. A horse tested positive for rabies in 2004 that had been pastured in LaSalle County.