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TO: DeKalb County News Media

FROM: DeKalb County Health Department

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DeKalb County Animal Control is advising pet owners to protect their pets from canine distemper

DeKalb County Animal Control is advising pet owners to protect their pets from canine distemper. The department has seen an increase in cases of confirmed canine distemper virus found in raccoons and skunks tested after displaying abnormal neurologic signs. Canine distemper outbreaks in local raccoon populations can signal increased risk for pet dogs in the area.

Canine distemper is a contagious and serious disease caused by a virus that attacks the respiratory, gastrointestinal and nervous systems of puppies and dogs. The virus can also be found in wildlife such as foxes, wolves, coyotes, raccoons, skunks, mink and ferrets. In wildlife, infection with canine distemper closely resembles rabies.

Puppies and dogs most often become infected through airborne exposure (through sneezing or coughing) to the virus from an infected dog or wild animal. The virus can also be transmitted by shared food and water bowls and equipment. Infected dogs can shed the virus for months, and mother dogs can pass the virus through the placenta to their puppies.

All dogs are at risk but puppies younger than four months old and dogs that have not been vaccinated against canine distemper are at increased risk of acquiring the disease. Distemper is often fatal, and dogs that survive usually have permanent, irreparable nervous system damage.

Vaccination is crucial in preventing canine distemper.

- A series of vaccinations is administered to puppies to increase the likelihood of building immunity when the immune system has not yet fully matured.
- Avoid gaps in the immunization schedule and make sure distemper vaccinations are up to date.
- Avoid contact with infected animals and wildlife
- Use caution when socializing puppies or unvaccinated dogs at parks, puppy classes, obedience classes, doggy day care and other places where dogs can congregate.
- Pet ferrets should be vaccinated against canine distemper using a USDA-approved ferret vaccine.

DeKalb County Animal Control responds to sick/injured wildlife during normal working hours (M-F 8:00 am to 4:30 pm) as time permits, with the exception of skunks (removal service must be utilized). After hours calls for sick/injured and all nuisance wildlife will need to be managed through a wildlife removal service for a fee. A list of wildlife removal companies can be found on our website.

<https://health.dekalbcounty.org/services/animal-control/>