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Animal Bites

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HUNTINGTON, West Virginia. Animal bites are a common occurrence, especially in the summertime. Dog bites are most common, however, bites from cats and wild animals are also common. Bites that break the skin can lead to infection. For the year 2009, Cabell County health officials reported 277 total exposures to animal bites.

The signs of an infection may include:

- ❖ Swelling and pain at the infection site
- ❖ Warmth around the wound
- ❖ Pus discharge
- ❖ Redness or streaking around the wound

If you have been bitten by an animal and there is bleeding, apply pressure to the wound with a clean dry cloth. If the wound is superficial, wash the area thoroughly with soap and water. Apply antibiotic ointment and cover with a bandage. If the bite occurred on the head or the face or if it is a deep wound, seek medical attention immediately. It is **ALWAYS** important to notify the health department of the animal bite. The health department needs to know if the animal is up to date on their rabies vaccine. If it is not, the animal may need to be quarantined and observed for rabies.

Rabies is a disease that is caused by a virus that attacks the nervous system. It can be spread through the bite from an animal that has the virus. In most cases in the U.S., an individual may get rabies from the bite of a wild animal, such as a skunk or raccoon. During the first stage of the illness, the individual may develop a headache, fever, decreased appetite, vomiting and malaise. There may also be itching and pain at the bite wound. During the second stage of the illness, the individual may be agitated or disoriented, have difficulty swallowing, and may develop paralysis or coma. Without treatment, rabies is almost always fatal. However, if rabies exposure is identified early, a series of vaccinations may be administered.

To prevent animal bites, the Cabell-Huntington Health Department recommends the following:

- Keeping all pets on a leash when out in public.
- Do not leave young children alone with pets.
- Make sure your dogs and cats are up to date on their rabies vaccinations.
- Do not approach anyone else's dog, cat, or a wild animal. More specifically, never reach through a fence to pet a dog or approach a dog that is tethered in the yard.
- Do not try to separate fighting animals.

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