

Humane Society of Elmore County News – 15 Aug ‘16
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Executive Director

While our Shelter is a private, not-for-profit organization, we have contracts with the county and cities in accordance with Alabama Law to provide an animal sheltering facility for Elmore County residents. Shelters exist under the state Rabies laws as a public health service so that there is a place for stray and unwanted pets to go to. The county and cities provide for the Animal Control Officers who are then able to bring any stray animals they pick up to us for the required seven-day hold to allow owners a chance to retrieve their lost pet(s). We provide a safe and humane shelter for the animals in our care and then work to find responsible homes for as many as we can.

One part of Alabama Law that causes some consternation and confusion is in regards to pets that have bitten a person. The bottom line is that we (shelter) cannot take in a dog, cat or ferret that has bitten (or exposed) a person in the preceding ten days as we are not a qualified quarantine facility under AL Law. AL Code Section 3-7A requires that a dog, cat or ferret that has bitten a person be either quarantined under the direct supervision of a licensed Alabama Veterinarian or the animal must be humanely euthanized and sent for rabies testing at one of the state laboratories. As we do not have a Veterinarian on our staff, we cannot take in animals that have bitten (or exposed – exposure as determined by a public health officer, Rabies Officer and/or Veterinarian) a person and we make no exceptions to this law, ever. Please understand it does not matter if the pet has a current vaccination, is ten years old or a week old, the law is very clear and we must deny entry to that pet.

So what do you do? If the pet that has bitten a person is owned, it is the owner's responsibility to have the pet legally quarantined or sent for testing and all of that is at the owner's expense. The owner of said animal has other legal issues and to quote AL Code Section 3-7A-9(d): It shall be a violation of this chapter for the owner of such animal to refuse to comply with the lawful order of the health officer in any particular case. It is unlawful for the owner to sell, give away, transfer to another location or otherwise dispose of any such animal that is known to have bitten or exposed a human being until it is released from quarantine by the rabies officer, duly licensed veterinarian or by the appropriate health officer. Violations of this law are punishable as a Class C Misdemeanor.

If the animal that has bitten is a stray, then this is when the city/county Animal Control Officers will come into play. Once that bite is reported to the Health Department (often via a doctor or the emergency room) or directly to police/sheriff, the Animal Control Officer will do their best to catch/trap the animal. Once caught, and identified as the animal that has bitten, the ACO will take the animal to a licensed Veterinarian for testing – in almost all instances those animals will not be quarantined but immediately sent for testing.

Rabies is still a very real and very dangerous disease. It is a preventable disease which is why it is so important to keep pets' rabies vaccinations current. Bites are serious as well and there are good reasons for our laws. So please understand that we operate within those laws and why we will not take in pets that have bitten a person. And please do not ignore bites either – rabies is a fatal disease if left untreated. If you (or any person) is bitten, please seek immediate medical treatment to ensure all necessary steps are taken to protect human life - it doesn't get much more important than that!