Hunt, prep and cook wild pigs safely to avoid diseases, warns Public Health

Albany, GA – Wild hogs are nuisances known for ripping up crops, pastures and woodlands, but they also carry infectious diseases, so hunters and others who come into contact with them or their meat should take precautions, says Southwest Health District Epidemiologist Jacqueline Jenkins.

“There are several diseases associated with wild – also known as feral – swine that can be transmitted to humans,” she said. “Some of them can result in long-term health problems or even death.”

Wild pigs, which cause tremendous damage to farmlands and native wildlife, are an invasive pest that may be hunted year-round in Georgia. “We want hunters and anyone else who may come into contact with feral swine to protect themselves appropriately against pathogens carried by infected animals,” Jenkins said.

Diseases associated with wild pigs include:

- **Brucellosis**, an infection that can be transmitted to humans when blood, body fluids or tissues from an infected animal come into contact with the eyes, nose, mouth or cuts in the skin. Brucellosis in humans may cause fever, chills, joint and muscle pain, fatigue and headache. It can lead to death if untreated.

- **Leptospirosis**, an infection spread through direct contact with contaminated pig urine or indirectly through contaminated water that comes in contact with skin, eyes or mucus membranes. Leptospirosis can cause fever, headache, muscle aches, vomiting, jaundice and diarrhea.
• **E. coli**, bacteria that can be transmitted by ingesting food contaminated with small amounts of fecal matter, can cause fever, abdominal cramps, diarrhea, or, in some cases, death.

• **Salmonellosis**, another foodborne illness, affects humans who eat contaminated food that has not been completely cooked, or which has been contaminated after preparation. Infected people experience headache, fever, abdominal cramps or diarrhea.

• **Hepatitis E** is a virus that can be passed to humans who consume undercooked meat. Symptoms include fever, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine and jaundice.

• **Influenza A** can also be transmitted to humans by wild swine. The virus may cause fever, chills, coughing, sneezing, weakness, lethargy – and in children – diarrhea and vomiting as well.

• **Toxoplasmosis**, a disease caused by parasites, is a significant health risk to pregnant women, their fetuses and immunocompromised people.

• **Trichinellosis**, transmitted by ingestion of roundworm larvae, can be transmitted through undercooked meat. It causes fever, abdominal pain, vomiting and diarrhea.

  Jenkins listed four action steps to avoid infections from feral swine:

  1. Wear protective gear (including goggles and gloves), when hunting and butchering. Clean gear with a disinfectant such as a diluted bleach solution.

  2. Use safe field-dressing methods. Avoid eating, smoking or drinking when dressing game. Clean cuts and scrapes appropriately and cover with bandages.

  3. Avoid direct contact with feral swine – don’t touch the carcass with bare hands. Don’t feed dogs raw meat or let them play with the animal carcass, as some diseases can spread from dogs to people.

  4. Cook meat thoroughly – 160 degrees F; and follow food safety rules to avoid cross-contamination. Be aware freezing, smoking, drying and pickling do not kill bacteria that cause brucellosis.
“Health and safety should remain a top priority,” Jenkins said. “Following the steps above can help ensure hunters and others who come into contact with feral pigs avoid the diseases these animals may carry, and safely enjoy meat they harvest.”

For more information, go to www.cdc.gov.

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