



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



As Wildlife Emerges from Winter, Vermonters Reminded to be Mindful of Rabies



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Media Contacts:

Vermont Department of Health
Communication Office
802-863-7281

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Animal and Plant Inspection Service
802-223-8697

Call the Rabies Hotline for Assistance: 802-223-8697 or 1-800-472-2437

BURLINGTON – Whether you are in Danville, Burlington, Manchester or points in between, now that winter is behind us, the threat of rabies increases as wildlife becomes more active. Fifteen animals have tested positive for rabies so far this year, most of them raccoons.

Rabies is a fatal viral disease that mainly affects wildlife (especially raccoons, foxes, bats, skunks and woodchucks), but can infect domestic animals and humans. A cat tested positive earlier this year.

The USDA Animal and Plant Inspection Service – Wildlife Services (APHIS) staff the Rabies Hotline, offering technical assistance on a variety of issues – from rabies and other wildlife disease education and awareness, to guidance for prevention and control of wildlife damage, to general wildlife biology. APHIS is also a key partner with the State in the annual rabies bait-drop that takes place in August to help keep rabies from spreading. Vermonters are asked to call the rabies hotline to report any dead skunks, fox, woodchucks, raccoons, or coyotes; and are encouraged to call with questions or to report an animal exhibiting strange behavior.

Rabies was first recorded in Vermont in 1963, and there have been no human cases of rabies reported to the Health Department. The virus can spread through the bite of – or contact with – saliva from an infected animal. Rabies vaccine given soon after exposure is highly effective at preventing illness. However, once the signs and symptoms of rabies start to appear, there is no treatment, and the disease is almost always fatal.

Vermont State Public Health Veterinarian Robert Johnson, DVM, said people should avoid animals that seem to be acting out of the ordinary. “You can’t tell if an animal has rabies by looking at it,” said Johnson. “If you see an animal that seems not quite right, leave it alone and call the rabies hotline or your town health officer. In Burlington, you can call the police department.”

Most important, said Johnson, “if an animal bites you, or you get animal saliva in a cut or in your eyes, nose or mouth, wash the area immediately and call your doctor.”

To reduce the risk of rabies, Dr. Johnson recommends getting pets vaccinated and taking steps to not attract wild animals. Be careful with food waste, compost, trash, and even making sure birdseed is not drawing unwanted guests. “And don’t feed or touch wild animals, or animals you don’t know – even the cute little babies.”

To reach the Vermont Rabies Hotline:

Vermont Phones: 1-800-472-2437 (1-800-4-RABIES)
Out-of-State Phones: 1-802-223-8697
Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

For more information about Rabies in Vermont, go to <http://healthvermont.gov/prevent/rabies/Rabies.aspx>

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Vermont Department of Health | 108 Cherry Street | Burlington, VT 05402
Voice: 802-863-7200 | In Vermont 800-464-4343 | Fax: 802-865-7754 | TTY/TDD: Dial 711 first
Health Care Provider Infectious Disease Reporting: 802-863-7240 or 800-640-4374
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