



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
Thomas Farley, MD, MPH
Commissioner

2009 Veterinary Alert # 11

Three Raccoons from Central Park Test Positive for Rabies in Recent Months

December 7, 2009

- Three raccoons collected from the northern end of Central Park have tested positive for rabies in 2009, two during the past week.
 - A fourth raccoon from Manhattan tested positive in July 2009 but was collected near Inwood Park.
 - To date in 2009, 20 animals have tested positive for rabies in NYC; 14 raccoons from the Bronx, 4 raccoons from Manhattan, 1 raccoon from Queens and 1 bat from Staten Island.
- Providers should:
- Advise clients to avoid approaching or feeding wildlife and to ensure that their pets are vaccinated against rabies and to keep pets leashed while outdoors unless at a specified off-leash area or park.
 - Report animal bites to the DOHMH Animal Bite Unit (contact information below).

Please share with your colleagues in Veterinary Medicine and your staff

Dear Veterinary Colleagues,

The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) Public Health Laboratory reported two positive rabies tests this week in raccoons collected from Central Park in Manhattan. One raccoon was found dead at W 93rd St. and Central Park West and the second raccoon was found ill at E. 106th and Fifth Avenue. There were no known human exposures to either raccoon. This makes a total of three rabid raccoons identified from Central Park this year, and the fourth raccoon from Manhattan in 2009. The first raccoon from Central Park tested positive on August 27th and was collected from the northernmost border of the Park at 110th St and Lenox Ave. A fourth raccoon from Manhattan tested positive earlier this year on July 6th but was collected near Inwood Park and may have crossed over from the Bronx.

Background: The finding of three raccoons collected in relatively close proximity and within 3 months of one another likely represents movement of raccoon rabies via terrestrial transmission into Manhattan. Raccoon rabies first arrived in NYC between 1992 and 1993, at which time rabid raccoons were identified in all boroughs except Brooklyn. By 1994, raccoon rabies was limited to the Bronx and Staten Island. Since then, enzootic raccoon rabies (defined as sustained transmission of the rabies virus in an area through ongoing transmission among raccoons) has only persisted in the boroughs of the Bronx and Staten Island. Between 1994 and 2008, occasional rabid raccoons have been identified in Queens (n=8) and Manhattan (n=2), but were presumed to have been sporadic cases and not suggestive of enzootic rabies transmission, as none of the raccoons were clustered in time or space. No rabid raccoons have ever been identified in Brooklyn. Current surveillance findings for animal rabies in NYC can be found on the DOHMH website at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/cd/cdrab-borough.shtml>.

Although rabid raccoons are usually symptomatic (seems sick, disoriented or unusually placid or aggressive), symptoms of rabies may not always be obvious. As such, any bite or scratch from a raccoon should result in medical treatment and rabies PEP, unless the animal tests negative for rabies. This is also true for other

rabies vector species (bats, skunks, coyote and fox) as well as any other animal that is capable of transmitting rabies.

It is important to note that bats are also known vectors of rabies, and that rabid bats have been found in all five boroughs of NYC.

Rabies is most commonly spread to domestic animals by attacks from wild animals. The DOHMH reminds veterinarians to consider rabies as part of the differential diagnosis for any animal that has been exposed to a potentially rabid wild or feral animal (particularly a rabies vector species such as raccoons, skunks and bats) and/or presenting with a progressive neurological illness.

The DOHMH also encourages veterinarians to ensure that their clients' pets are up-to-date on rabies vaccinations. Maintaining vaccination against rabies is required for all dogs and cats, 4 months of age or older in New York City. Any unvaccinated dog or cat that may have been exposed to a rabid animal is required to enter into six-month quarantine in an approved facility or be euthanized. If a pet is up-to-date with its rabies vaccination but potentially exposed to a rabid animal, a booster vaccine should be given immediately, and the owner should be advised to confine and observe the animal at home for the next 45 days.

Any pet dog or cat that has bitten or scratched a person is required to be confined and observed by the owner (in most instances) for 10 days. If the dog or cat is not currently vaccinated against rabies, vaccination should not occur until after completion of the 10 day observation period. Animal bites are reportable to the DOHMH Veterinary Public Health Services (VPHS) Animal Bite Unit at 212-676-2483. For questions about whether persons should receive rabies PEP, contact a health care provider or the DOHMH Bureau of Communicable Disease (BCD) at 212-788-9830 during business hours (Outside of business hours, please call the Poison Control Center at 212-POISONS or 212-764-7667.)

Additional information about rabies is available on the DOHMH website at <http://www.nyc.gov/health/rabies> including summary data for New York City,

What All Veterinarians Can Do

- Educate clients to:
 - Avoid contact with wild animals.
 - Make sure their dog or cat is up-to-date on its rabies vaccinations.
 - Feed pets indoors.
 - Avoid leaving their pets outdoors unattended.
 - Avoid trying to separate animals that are fighting.
 - Contact their veterinarian if their pet has been in contact with an animal that might be rabid.
- Report all suspected animal rabies cases to the DOHMH VPHS.
- Contact us for more information
 - Veterinary Public Health Services 212-676-2483
 - Bureau of Communicable Disease 212-788-9830
 - After Hours: NYC Poison Control Center 212-764-7667

A summary of animal rabies diagnostic testing at the Rabies Laboratory in NYC from January to June 30th, 2009 as well as rabies activity in previous years is attached to this alert. As always, we greatly appreciate your partnership and cooperation.

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