

Raccoon Tests Positive for Rabies After Biting and Scratching Individual in New Castle County

DOVER (Nov. 12, 2021) – The Delaware Division of Public Health (DPH) is advising residents who live or frequent the vicinity of Frazer and Denny Roads in Bear of a positive case of rabies in a raccoon that bit and scratched a human on November 7. The raccoon was tested for rabies and the results were positive. The victim who was bitten and scratched has begun exposure prophylaxis.

Anyone who thinks they may have been bitten, scratched, or come in contact with a raccoon in this area should immediately contact their health care provider or call the DPH Rabies Program at 302-744-4995. An epidemiologist is available 24/7. Anyone in the area who thinks a raccoon might have bitten their pet should call their private veterinarian for examination, treatment, and to report the exposure to Delaware Department of Agriculture.

Rabies is a preventable disease. DPH recommends that individuals take the following steps to prevent rabies exposure:

- All dogs, cats, and ferrets 6 months of age and older are required by Delaware law to be vaccinated against rabies by a licensed veterinarian.
- Pet owners can reduce the possibility of pets being exposed to rabies by keeping them indoors and not letting them roam free. It is especially important for pet owners who do allow their cats to roam outdoors to vaccinate their pets.

- Do not touch or otherwise handle wild or unfamiliar animals, including cats and dogs, even if they appear friendly.
- Do not keep your pet's food or water outdoors; bowls can attract wild and stray animals.
- Do not feed feral animals, including cats, as the risk of rabies in wildlife is significant.
- Spaying or neutering your pet may reduce the tendency to roam or fight and, thus, reduce the chance they will be exposed to rabies.
- Keep your garbage securely covered.
- Consider vaccinating livestock and horses, as well. It is recommended to consult with your private veterinarian if you have any questions regarding whether your animal(s) should be vaccinated against rabies.

Since Jan. 1, 2021, DPH has performed rabies tests on 176 animals, 18 of which were confirmed to be rabid, including one dog, one deer, one fox, one cow, two skunks, three cats, six bats and three raccoons, including this most recent positive case. DPH only announces those rabies cases for which it is possible the animal had unknown contacts with additional humans or pets.

In 2020, DPH performed rabies tests on 121 animals, four of which were confirmed to be rabid along with two positive specimens tested out of state, including one raccoon, one bat and four cats.

Rabies is an infectious disease affecting the nervous system of humans and other mammals. Infection can occur through the bite or scratch of an infected animal or if saliva from such an animal gets into the eyes, nose, mouth, or an opening in the skin. Rabies in humans and animals cannot be cured once symptoms appear. Therefore, if a human has been exposed, and the animal is unavailable to be quarantined or tested, DPH recommends that people receive post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) treatment, a series of four vaccinations, as a precautionary

measure.

If You Encounter an Animal Behaving Aggressively:

If you encounter a wild animal (other than a feral cat or dog) behaving aggressively, it is recommended you contact the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control's (DNREC) Wildlife Section at 302-739-9912 or 302-735-3600. Staff will determine whether it is more appropriate to refer callers to a private nuisance wildlife control operator. A listing of nuisance wildlife control operators can be found at <https://wildlifehelp.org/>. Calls after hours and on weekends can be made to the 24-hour dispatch number at 800-523-3336.

Do not throw items at the animal or make loud banging noises, which may startle the animal and cause it to attack. Instead, your initial response – if the animal is behaving in an aggressive manner or appears to be foaming at the mouth – should be to raise your hands above your head to make yourself appear larger to the animal while slowly backing away from it.

If the animal starts coming toward you, raise your voice and yell sternly at it, "Get away!" If all that fails, use any means to protect yourself including throwing an object at the animal or trying to keep it away by using a long stick, shovel, or fishing pole.

If you encounter a stray or feral domestic animal, such as a cat or dog, behaving aggressively, contact the Office of Animal Welfare at 302-255-4646.

If You Encounter a Sick or Injured Animal:

To report a sick or hurt wild animal, Delaware residents are asked to contact the DNREC's Wildlife Section at 302-739-9912 or 302-735-3600. Staff will determine whether it is more appropriate to refer callers to a permitted volunteer wildlife rehabilitator.

If you encounter a sick stray domestic animal, such as a cat or dog, contact the Office of Animal Welfare at 302-255-4646.

For more information on the DPH rabies program, visit www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/dpc/rabies.html or call 1-866-972-9705 or 302-744-4995. For more information on rabies, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov/rabies/.