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# media release

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 20, 2015

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### *Pet and Livestock Owners Cautioned About Rabid Skunks*

The Colorado Department of Agriculture and Tri-County Health Department have confirmed three rabid skunks in Adams, Arapahoe and Elbert counties in the past week. Pet owners are encouraged to check records to ensure rabies vaccinations are up to date. Livestock may have been exposed to rabies and owners need to be vigilant in monitoring health issues in their animals, and discuss any animal health concerns with their local veterinarian. Tri-County Health Department staff members will notify the residents living near each of the skunk incidents about the benefit of vaccinating their pets and livestock.

“The Department of Agriculture would like to stress two very important points,” said State Veterinarian, Dr. Keith Roehr. “One—livestock owners need to be aware that rabies can transfer from one species to another so they should monitor their property for skunks; and two—local veterinarians are a valuable resource to help producers decide the best course of action to protect their herds from rabies.”

“These rabid skunks confirm that rabies is present in the eastern regions of these counties. Rabies can spread from skunks to other mammals and we are concerned about the increase in skunk activity this time of year. Rabies is a deadly disease and vaccination is the single best method to protect your pets and livestock. People can get rabies if an animal in their home or on their property gets sick from being bitten by a rabid skunk,” said John M. Douglas, Jr., MD, Executive Director of Tri-County Health Department.

Between January 1 and April 17, 2015, there have been six rabid skunks identified in Adams, Arapahoe and Elbert counties, five since March 4th. For statewide data please visit <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/rabies-data>.

Rabies is a viral disease in mammals that infects the brain and nearly all cases result in death. The clinical appearance of rabies typically falls into two category types: “aggressive” and “dumb.” Aggressive rabies symptoms include combativeness and unusual aggressive behavior such as biting. There is also a “dumb” form of the disease in which the animal is lethargic, weak in one or more limbs, and unable to raise its head or make sounds because its throat and neck muscles are paralyzed.

Rabies is spread primarily through the bite of rabid animals, resulting in the spread of the disease through their infected saliva. Once symptoms of rabies infection appear, no cure exists and it is virtually always fatal. People that have been exposed to rabies can receive medication to prevent illness. For pets and livestock, routine rabies vaccination of animals offers protection. Animal vaccination regimens vary so livestock and pet owners are urged to discuss the vaccine with their local veterinarian. Pet vaccination is also required in many jurisdictions.

“Animal owners concerned about rabies exposure need to primarily look for any dramatic behavioral changes. That is typically one of the hallmark signs that the animal may be suffering from rabies,” said Dr. Roehr. “Additionally, while house pets are often vaccinated, barn cats or outdoor pets are often forgotten. All animals should be considered in the vaccination plan you discuss with your veterinarian.”

In addition to ensuring that pets and livestock are vaccinated properly against rabies, here are additional prevention steps:

- Be aware of skunks out during the day. This is abnormal behavior and these animals should be avoided.
- Be aware of areas that can be suitable habitat for skunks such as dark holes, under buildings, and under equipment.
- Don't feed wild animals or allow your pets around them. Be sure to teach children to stay away from wild animals. Avoid leaving pet food outside as that may attract a wild animal.
- Contact your veterinarian right away if any of your animals are bitten or scratched by any wild animal, particularly skunks, bats, foxes or raccoons.
- If your animals exhibit any dramatic behavioral changes, contact your veterinarian as soon as possible. Isolate and avoid contact with these animals if possible.
- If you have been bitten or scratched by a wild animal, contact your physician and Tri-County Health Department (303-220-9200) right away.
- Rabies vaccination should be considered for horses and other equines, breeding livestock, dairy cattle or other livestock.
- If you must remove a dead skunk on your property, wear rubber gloves or lift the carcass with a shovel or other tool, and double-bag it for the trash. Do not directly touch the skunk with bare hands.

If you have questions about rabies call Tri-County Health Department at 303-220-9200 or COHELP, the statewide public health information line at 1-877-462-2911.

#### **Additional Information About Rabies**

- Tri-County Health Department: [www.tchd.org/rabies.htm](http://www.tchd.org/rabies.htm)
- Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment Rabies Data: <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/rabies-data>