



## HEALTH UPDATE

### World Rabies Day is September 28

Rabies is a viral disease that affects the nervous system of humans and other mammals and is nearly always fatal. The virus is shed in the saliva of infected animals and is usually transmitted through a bite or scratch by a rabid animal but can also be transmitted through the rabid animal's saliva if it comes in contact with an animal or human's eyes, nose, mouth or open wounds. Rabies is preventable through animal control programs, vaccination of domestic animals, and prompt medical care following animal bites. We thank you for your efforts to prevent human rabies in the Colorado.

**Animal Control agencies and Colorado Parks and Wildlife play a vital role every day in preventing rabies in our communities and we appreciate your dedicated work and assistance to Tri-County Health Department (TCHD).**

| Species      | Number of Lab Confirmed Rabies Positive Animals in Colorado, January 1-September 19, 2014 |
|--------------|---|
| Bat          | 78  |
| Skunk        | 22  |
| Fox          | 1   |
| Raccoon      | 2   |
| Cat          | 2   |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>105</b>  |

Of the 105 animals, 67 were known or strongly suspected of exposing 83 domestic animals and 49 humans. There have been no human cases of rabies in Colorado since 1931, and no canine rabies cases in Colorado since 2003. There have been feline rabies cases in Colorado in the past few years including 2014, due to south-central skunk variant.

| Species      | Number of Lab Confirmed Rabies Positive Animals in Tri-County Health Department Jurisdiction (Adams, Arapahoe and Douglas Counties), January 1-September 19, 2014 |
|--------------|---|
| Bat          | 5 (3 Arapahoe, 2 Douglas Counties)  |
| Skunk        | 3 (Adams County)  |
| Raccoon      | 1 (Douglas County, variant typing pending)  |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>9</b>  |

Surveillance from 2008-2014 suggests the epizootic of skunk rabies is impacting western and eastern Adams County, central and eastern Arapahoe County, and the southern and eastern sections of Douglas County. However, we consider the risk of skunk rabies exposure to be present throughout the Tri-County region.

In Colorado, rabies is most likely to be found in bats, skunks, raccoons and foxes. Surveillance demonstrates spillover infections in other wild animals (such as mountain lions), horses, cows and cats. Animal Control officers and veterinarians should remain alert to the expansion of the rabies epizootic and are encouraged to recommend rabies vaccinations by a licensed veterinarian for ALL domestic animals including cats and livestock.

Tri-County Health Department is available for consultation on the management of people and/or domestic animals that might have been exposed to rabies. We can be reached at **303-220-9200** and ask to speak with a Disease Intervention Specialist. After hours, you may call our pager at **303-461-2342**. **Thank you for partnering with us to reduce the risk of rabies transmission in our community!**

### **Public Health's Rabies Prevention Messages**

- **If a person potentially had exposure (scratch, bite, direct contact) to any wild animal that could potentially transmit rabies, including bats, skunks, raccoons, foxes, coyotes, etc., they should be instructed to call Tri-County Health Department and their healthcare provider.** TCHD can help determine the need for rabies post-exposure prophylaxis and arrange for its administration if indicated. Prompt medical treatment is the key to preventing rabies.
- **When a pet is exposed to a wild animal, the owner should be instructed to call their veterinarian and Tri-County Health Department** to assess the rabies risk and determine the appropriate quarantine for the pet and to receive an immediate rabies vaccination.
- If a person or pet animal had unknown exposure to a bat **contact TCHD promptly for assistance. The bat should be safely captured and held until testing recommendations have been determined.**
- Animal Control Officers and Colorado Parks and Wildlife Officers **should receive pre-exposure rabies vaccinations**, especially those that have contact with wildlife, feral or stray animals or perform animal decapitations for rabies testing. Even if a person received pre-exposure vaccination, they should still get prompt medical evaluation for a potential rabies exposure.
- **Proper personal protective equipment (PPE) should be worn when performing decapitations** for rabies testing to include double gloves, a surgical mask, face shield and gown. Do not remove PPE until after all equipment is washed. **Also wear gloves when examining any animal with a bite wound from a wild animal OR when examining any animal with acute neurologic symptoms or other signs that may suggest rabies.** Rabies virus is present in saliva and can be transmitted through open wounds such as cuts on your hands. Public Health has responded to numerous exposures when vets or technicians examine the mouth of an animal subsequently diagnosed with rabies without using PPE, resulting in anxiety and preventable costs for post-exposure prophylaxis.
- **Contact TCHD or Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment if you suspect an animal may have rabies.** We will assist in coordinating safe animal capture, testing for rabies, and assessment of rabies exposures. The state public health lab does **NOT** charge for rabies testing whenever a human or pet has been exposed to a wild animal and the animal is available for testing, or if the animal is highly suspected of being rabid (approved case-by-case).

### **Remind Pet Owners How They Can Protect Themselves from Rabies**

- **Vaccinate their pets**, including their barn cats, indoor cats (bats gain access inside houses) and livestock to avoid expensive quarantines or even euthanasia due to exposure to a rabid animal.
- **Do not let pets roam freely**, since this can increase the chance that they could be exposed to rabies without their owner's knowledge.
- **Do not handle or feed wildlife and teach children to stay away from all wild animals**, stray domestic pets, or any dead animals and tell an adult if they are scratched or bitten.
- **Recognize the signs of rabies.** Nocturnal wildlife suffering from rabies will often be out during the day, have trouble walking, exhibit abnormal behavior such as aggression or completely lose their natural fear to humans.

### **Web resources**

- TCHD: <http://www.tchd.org/396/Animal-Bites-Rabies>
- Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment: <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/rabies> Colorado Rabies Resource Guide, <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/colorado-rabies-resource-guide> which is a resource for "first responders" to assist in the monitoring, prevention and control of rabies in Colorado.
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife 303-291-7227 for concerns of a wild animal behaving abnormally
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/>
- You can find out more about World Rabies Day at <http://www.worldrabiesday.org>.