



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
Ashwin Vasan, MD, PhD
Commissioner

2022 Veterinary Alert # 10

Cluster of Rabid Raccoons in Queens and Brooklyn

- To date in 2022, 12 raccoons and one kitten in Queens, and two in Brooklyn (near the Queens border) tested positive for rabies at the Public Health Laboratory. Prior to 2022, no more than three rabid raccoons had been reported in Queens in any given year.
- Most of the rabid raccoons were collected in central Queens near the Brooklyn border. This area spans multiple greenspaces, including parks and cemeteries. Four rabid racoons were found near Alley Pond Park (see [map](#) below, also available on the NYC [rabies location page](#)).
- To reduce ongoing transmission, oral rabies vaccine baits were distributed in the affected areas; this is in addition to baiting done earlier this year as part of [annual vaccination efforts](#).
- Veterinarians should ensure that their clients' pets are up to date for rabies vaccination and educate pet owners about rabies prevention.
- Veterinarians should consider rabies in the differential diagnosis and [report](#) any patient with a history of exposure to a potentially rabid wild or feral animal, a bite wound of unknown origin, recent importation, or if presenting with progressive neurologic disease.
- Refer to [flowcharts](#) for the management of dogs and cats that have bitten someone, or were exposed to rabies. For current information on rabies and animals testing positive for rabies in NYC, visit nyc.gov/health/rabies.

Please share with your colleagues in Veterinary Medicine and your staff

November 2, 2022

Dear Veterinary Colleagues,

To date this year, the New York City (NYC) Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (Health Department) Public Health Laboratory has detected [rabies in 12 raccoons and one cat](#) in Queens, and two in Brooklyn near the Queens border. Most of the rabid raccoons were collected in or around greenspaces near the Brooklyn border, including cemeteries and parks; four rabid racoons were found near Alley Pond Park (see [map](#) below, also available [online](#)). All 12 raccoons were submitted for rabies testing because they appeared ill or injured; there were no known human or pet exposures. The kitten was a stray and rescued by a family October 14. It developed neurologic illness on October 24 and died on October 29 and was submitted to PHL where it tested positive for rabies. One person bitten by the kitten started rabies postexposure prophylaxis. Historically, no more than three rabid raccoons had been reported from Queens in any given year. In addition to these raccoons, one cat, two raccoons and two bats in Staten Island, and two skunks and six raccoons in the Bronx, have tested positive for rabies.

In response, additional oral rabies vaccine (ORV) baits were distributed by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). This is in addition to routine annual ORV baiting done in September as described in the [2022 Veterinary Alert #8](#). Increasing the number of vaccinated raccoons in the area may help disrupt

ongoing transmission of the virus among raccoons, and prevent spillover to other wildlife, domestic animals, and people.

In NYC and along the Atlantic Coast, rabid raccoons pose the greatest risk of rabies for pets and other domestic animals. Less commonly, rabid bats can also transmit rabies. Remember to consider rabies as part of the differential diagnosis for any animal presenting with a progressive neurological illness, particularly if the animal is a stray; has a history of a bite wound of unknown origin; has a known exposure to a potentially rabid animal or rabies vector species (raccoons, skunks and bats); or is a dog imported from a country where dog rabies (canine rabies variant) circulates.

Rabies Vaccination for Dogs and Cats

Dogs and cats are required to maintain vaccination against rabies. The NYC Health Code requires that all puppies and kittens receive their first rabies shot(s) by four months of age. Revaccination is required no later than one year after primary vaccination. Revaccinations should be done in accordance with the recommendations of the manufacturer of a USDA-approved rabies vaccine intended to maintain active immunization. Veterinarians should educate their clients that even indoor dogs and cats are at risk if they encounter a raccoon in the backyard, escape outside, or if a rabid bat enters the home.

Refer to the [flowcharts](#) for guidance on:

1. Management of Dogs and Cats Exposed to a Rabies Vector Species or Any Rabid Animal ***Report to the NYC Health Department any dog or cat that may have been exposed to a rabid animal.***

Upon consultation with the NYC Health Department's Veterinary Public Health Services (VPHS) Animal Bite Unit, cases will be assessed on an individual basis and options may include:

- Never vaccinated against rabies
 - Isolate in veterinary facility for up to six months at owner's expense; or
 - Euthanize
- Currently vaccinated against rabies
 - Immediately give booster vaccine. Confine and observe in owner's home for 45 days
- Not up to date with rabies vaccine
 - Managed on a case-by-case basis

2. Management of Healthy Dogs and Cats That Have Bitten a Person

- Confine and observe dog or cat for 10 days
 - If animal is not up to date with rabies vaccine, do not vaccinate until end of 10-day observation period
 - If animal remains healthy, rabies post-exposure prophylaxis is not indicated for the bite victim
 - If animal becomes ill, must be evaluated by veterinarian and the VPHS Animal Bite Unit

Veterinarians should educate clients to:

- Avoid contact with wild animals and stray animals
- Make sure their dog or cat is up to date on rabies vaccinations
- Avoid leaving their pets outdoors unattended and feed them indoors
- Avoid trying to separate animals that are fighting

- Contact their veterinarian if their pet has been in contact with a rabies vector species including a raccoon, skunk, bat; or any animal that is displaying signs of rabies

To report animal bites and suspected animal rabies cases or for question on rabies exposures and other animal-related issues, contact the NYC Health Department:

- VPHS Animal Bite Unit Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm: 646-364-1799
- Poison Control Center after business hours: 212-POISONS (212-764-7667)

For questions on rabies exposures in people, post-exposure prophylaxis, and other human-related rabies issues contact the NYC Health Department:

- Bureau of Communicable Disease during business hours: 347-396-2600
- NYC Poison Control Center after business hours: 212-POISONS (212-764-7667)

For information about rabies:

- [NYC Health Department: Rabies](#)
- [New York State Department of Health: Rabies](#)

We appreciate your continued collaboration with our efforts to monitor public health issues in NYC.

Sincerely,

Kevin Lovingood, MPH; Asha Abdool, MPH; Christina Ng, MPH; Renee King, MPH; Ryan MacDonald, MPH; Marc Paladini, MPH; Sally Slavinski, DVM, MPH, DACVPM

Zoonotic and Vector-borne Disease

Bureau of Communicable Disease

ZIVDU@health.nyc.gov

347-396-2600

-Visit our webpage for more information and resources for veterinarians including archived Veterinary Alerts:

[Zoonotic and Vector-borne Diseases: Information for Providers](#)

-If you do not receive these alerts via email and would like to be added to the distribution list, please email

zivdu@health.nyc.gov

-Certain animal diseases must be reported to the NYC Health Department

- Online through a [secure web-based reporting platform](#)
- By calling 347-396-2600
- By faxing the [Animal Disease Case Report form](#) to 347-396-2753

-Report the following diseases immediately upon suspicion of an infected animal: anthrax, brucellosis, glanders, influenza (novel with pandemic potential), monkeypox, plague, Q fever, rabies, SARS, tularemia

-Report the following diseases within 24 hours upon laboratory diagnosis: arboviral encephalitides, leptospirosis, psittacosis, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, salmonellosis, tuberculosis

- Report within 24 hours any outbreak or suspected outbreak of any disease, condition, or syndrome, of known or unknown etiology, which may pose a danger to public health; or an unusual manifestation of a disease in an animal

Animal Rabies in New York City, 2022

