



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

2023 Veterinary Alert #3: Rabid Skunk in Brooklyn

- On April 18, a sick skunk collected from Greenwood Heights, Brooklyn tested positive for rabies; this is the first rabid skunk ever reported in Brooklyn.
- Ensure that animals are up to date on their rabies vaccination and educate pet owners regarding rabies prevention.
- Consider rabies in the differential diagnosis for any animal with an exposure to a potentially rabid raccoon or other wild or feral animal, a bite wound of unknown origin, progressive neurologic disease, or recent importation.
- 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.

April 27, 2023

Dear Colleagues,

On April 18, a sick skunk collected from the Greenwood Heights section of Brooklyn tested positive for rabies. This is the first rabid skunk ever reported in Brooklyn. There were no known human or pet exposures to the skunk.

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. Raccoon rabies variant virus can occasionally spill over to other species, most often skunks and cats. Skunks and raccoons in Greenwood Heights, Brooklyn have been observed co-mingling with stray cats while feeding on cat food likely put out for stray and feral cats, creating opportunities for rabies transmission if an animal is infected.

Animal rabies surveillance began in NYC in 1992. Raccoon rabies was first detected in Brooklyn in 2012 in a raccoon in Prospect Park West. Since then, four raccoons were reported further south in Brooklyn in 2014, one in 2020, and two in 2022 near the Queens border (see [Animals Testing Positive for Rabies](#) for maps). Rabies epizootics are most common in the Bronx and Staten Island. Rabid raccoons are occasionally found in Queens and less often in Manhattan; clusters were last detected in Queens in [October 2022](#) and in Manhattan in [November 2019](#). To date, in 2023, three animals have tested positive for rabies in NYC: a skunk from the Bronx, a raccoon from Queens, and the recent skunk from Brooklyn.

To reduce the risk of further spread of rabies, oral rabies vaccine (ORV) baiting will be conducted in the areas surrounding where the skunk was found to vaccinate raccoons and skunks. This is in

addition to routine ORV baiting that has been done annually since 2014 in parts of Queens, Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Staten Island to help prevent rabies transmission. Veterinarians should encourage people who feed stray and feral cats to limit access to the food by, for example, putting food out at a certain time each day and removing food after an hour. They should avoid leaving cat food out indefinitely that can be easily accessed by wildlife.

Consider rabies as part of the differential diagnosis for any animal presenting with an exposure to a potentially rabid raccoon or other wild or feral animal, a bite wound of unknown origin, progressive neurological illness or in a dog imported from a country where the canine rabies variant is present.

Rabies Vaccination for Dogs and Cats

Maintaining vaccination against rabies is required of all dogs and cats in NYC. 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 the primary vaccination, and revaccinations administered at intervals thereafter to maintain active immunization. Veterinarians should educate their clients that even indoor dogs and cats are at risk if they escape outside or if a rabid bat enters the home.

Management guidelines for dogs and cats with a known exposure to a rabies vector species or any rabid animal (see [flowchart](#) online for details)

Report to the Health Department any dog or cat that may have been exposed to a rabid animal. Upon consultation with the Veterinary Public Health Services' (VPHS) Animal Bite Unit (ABU), cases will be assessed on an individual basis and options may include:

- If never vaccinated against rabies
 - Quarantine in veterinary facility for up to 6 months at owner's expense or euthanize
- If currently vaccinated against rabies
 - Immediately give booster vaccine; confine and observe in owner's home for 45 days
- If not currently vaccinated
 - Managed on a case-by-case basis

Management guidelines for healthy dogs and cats that have bitten a person (see [flowchart](#) online for details)

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

What All Veterinarians Can Do

- **Educate** clients to:
 - Avoid contact with wild and stray animals
 - Make sure their dog or cat is up to date on its 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 raccoon, skunk, bat or any animal that might be rabid

- **Report** animal bites and suspect animal rabies cases to the NYC Health Department’s Veterinary Public Health Services (VPHS) Animal Bite Unit

During business hours	VPHS Animal Bite Unit (ABU)	646-364-1799
Outside business hours	NYC Poison Control Center	212-POISONS (212-764-7667)

- **Questions?** Call the NYC Health Department

Questions on rabies exposures in pets, animal bites, and other animal-related issues	Veterinary Public Health Services	646-364-1783
Questions on rabies exposures in people, PEP, and other human-related rabies issues	Bureau of Communicable Disease	347-396-2600
After business hours	NYC Poison Control Center	212-764-7667

As always, we greatly appreciate your partnership and cooperation.

Sincerely,

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

Zoonotic and Vector-borne Disease
 Bureau of Communicable Disease
ZIVDU@health.nyc.gov
 347-396-2600

Norma Torres, Director
 Veterinary Public Health Services
 Division of Environmental Health

Visit our webpage for information and resources for veterinarians: [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

Report animal diseases to the NYC Department of Health.

- Submit online through a [secure web-based reporting platform](#)
- Call 347-396-2600
- Fax the [Animal Disease Case Report form](#) to 347-396-2753

Report upon suspicion: Anthrax, brucellosis, glanders, influenza (novel with pandemic potential), monkeypox, plague, Q fever, rabies, SARS, tularemia

Report 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.