

Rabies in Yuma Co.

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

Due to the recent confirmation of two rabid skunks in Yuma County, as well as a suspected rabid raccoon in Washington County, the Northeast Colorado Health Department would like to remind residents that local regulations require every owner or keeper of a dog or cat have their animal vaccinated against rabies.

These are the fourth and fifth cases already confirmed in Colorado this spring, the first in Kit Carson County, the other two in Kiowa and Lincoln counties.

“Since we know rabies is circulating in the area, we are urging animal owners to contact their veterinarians immediately to ensure that their pets are up to date on their rabies vaccination,” said Julie McCaleb, NCHD’s environmental health director. “The vaccine is a simple and effective way to protect not only your pets, but also family members that have contact with pets, from this deadly disease.”

In fact, two local residents already are undergoing treatment after having contact with an animal suspected of having rabies.

According to McCaleb, the skunks were trapped by Division of Wildlife officials in Yuma County on April 17 and subsequently sent off for testing. Tests confirmed that both were infected with a skunk strain of the rabies virus, rather than the normal bat strain of rabies usually found in Colorado.

In addition, NCHD was informed on April 26 about a suspect raccoon in southern Washington County that was displaying symptoms of rabies.

While bat strains of rabies virus have limited risk of becoming established in other animal species and spreading to other wildlife and pets, skunk strains of rabies are different. The dynamics of where skunks live and how they behave and interact with other animals increases the risk of spillover infection to other wildlife.

Rabies is a virus that affects the nervous system of humans and other mammals, resulting in a fatal disease. The virus is transmissible through the saliva of infected animals. People and animals get rabies from the bite of a rabid animal or contact with saliva from such an animal.

Two local persons are already going through rabies prophylaxis due to contact with a suspect calf south of Yuma that was not available for testing.

Signs of rabies in animals include abnormal behavior like being active in the day for nocturnal species; approaching humans or animals; difficulty with walking or movement; and unusual vocalization (like excessive bellowing in cows or hissing/chirping in bats).

Such signs are an indication the animal is ill. Some animals with rabies will be very aggressive (“furious” rabies) while others may appear almost catatonic (“dumb” rabies). Suspected rabid animals should be avoided and reported to the local authorities.

To prevent possible exposure to rabies, health experts warn residents to keep their pets’ vaccinations up-to-date; leave wildlife alone and, if they suspect a family member or pet has been bitten, contact a medical provider or local veterinarian immediately.

For more information contact the Northeast Colorado Health Department at 970-522-3741, or visit the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment’s website at cdphe.state.co.us.