

Rabid cat found in Washington County; human exposure confirmed

Written by Holyoke Enterprise
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The Northeast Colorado Health Department received word that a cat has tested positive for rabies near the Washington/Yuma County lines. The cat was an ill outdoor cat that bit and/or scratched an adult and minor. Those individuals have been started on post-exposure rabies prophylaxis.

Although this is the first confirmed rabid animal in Washington County since 2007, it is the second cat to test positive for rabies in northeast Colorado since January, and it brings the total rabid animal count, year-to-date, to 23 in northeast Colorado.

NCHD has a new geographical map on their website, www.nchd.org, that documents the locations of the rabid animals found in the region this year.

“We’ve been surprised for some time that we haven’t had any positive rabid animals reported in [Washington County], due to the fact that we’re seeing numbers escalate across our other counties,” said Dr. Tony Cappello, NCHD’s public health director.

“The fact that we’re seeing this virus in a cat for the first time in Washington County, rather than a skunk, lets us know that there’s a high probability the virus has already spilled over into other wildlife and confirms our suspicions it’s been here all along.”

Cappello went on to stress that the best form of protection for pets and family members is to make sure animals are up to date on their rabies vaccinations.

“People don’t often approach skunks or other wildlife if they are acting strange or appear ill, but it’s typical for family members to want to handle or comfort their own pets if they think there’s a problem; that’s where we’re seeing human exposures through bites and scratches of their own pets,” said Cappello.

“This is the reason a rabies vaccination for your pets offer the best protection. It’s also easy and affordable to obtain from your veterinarian, and a very logical alternative to a family member

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having to receive post-exposure prophylaxis, which is quite expensive and involves a series of shots.”

Cappello stressed that in order for a rabies vaccination to be recognized under state statute, it must be administered by a licensed veterinarian. Vaccinations given by pet owners are not considered adequate if there is a suspected or confirmed rabies exposure. The recommended course of action for non-vaccinated pets in this instance is euthanasia.

If anyone witnesses a suspected rabid skunk or other wild animal, they should contact the sheriff's office or local police in their area. To prevent possible exposure to rabies, health experts warn residents to keep their pets' vaccinations up to date; leave wildlife alone, do not take in stray animals, especially feral cats; and if they suspect a family member or pet has been bitten or scratched, contact a medical provider or local veterinarian immediately.

For more information on rabies, contact NCHD at 970-522-3741 or visit www.nchd.org to view a list of frequently asked questions about the virus and a geographical map of rabid animals in northeast Colorado. For information on rabies vaccinations, contact a local veterinarian.

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