



Q & A: Baylisascariasis ("Raccoon Roundworm Infection")

1 WHAT IS BAYLISASCARIASIS?

Baylisascariasis is a rare, sometimes fatal disease caused by a small, worm-like parasite called the raccoon roundworm or *Baylisascaris procyonis*. The parasite is carried by raccoons, which shed eggs of the parasite in their feces. Fewer than 20 cases have been reported in the United States since 1975, but most of these were in young children. Two cases were reported in New York City in 2009.

2 HOW CAN PEOPLE BECOME INFECTED?

The eggs can survive in dirt for several years but are too small to see without a microscope. People can become infected by ingesting dirt that is contaminated with the eggs. Small children or developmentally disabled persons are especially at risk as they are more likely to put dirt and objects found in the dirt in their mouths. Persons who live in or visit areas where raccoons are present, such as parks or woods, are also potentially at risk.

3 WHAT SIGNS OF DISEASE SHOULD YOU LOOK FOR?

Fever, irritable mood, problems with balance, weakness, sleepiness, stiff muscles, uncontrolled movements, shaking, seizures, or blindness are all symptoms seen with baylisascariasis.



Places to look for raccoon feces

4 WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY FROM BAYLISASCARIASIS?

- Remove or cover any outside food sources that might attract raccoons, including garbage cans or bird feeders
- Never feed raccoons or bring one into your home as a pet
- Close off sandboxes, attics and basements at night
- Wash your hands with soap and water after working outside with dirt, leaves or wood
- Wash children's hands after playing outside, especially before eating
- Supervise small children outdoors to make sure they do not put dirt, leaves or wood in their mouths or touch animal feces while playing outside

5 WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU THINK SOMEONE IN YOUR FAMILY HAS EATEN RACCOON FECES OR HAS SYMPTOMS OF BAYLISASCARIASIS?

If you think that someone in your family has ingested raccoon feces, immediately contact your health care provider to discuss what can be done to prevent infection. If someone in your family has symptoms of the disease seek medical care and remember to tell your health care provider that you are concerned about baylisascariasis (or raccoon roundworm infection).

6 HOW SHOULD YOU CLEAN UP RACCOON FECES?

After a raccoon sheds *Baylisascaris* eggs, it takes about 2-4 weeks for the eggs to become infectious to people, so quickly removing fresh raccoon feces can prevent exposure and infection. If you think you have raccoon feces on your property, you or a licensed wildlife professional should carefully remove the feces while wearing gloves. Throw out the feces and any protective gear used while cleaning into doubled garbage bags. Feces-contaminated surfaces such as decks and patios should be treated with boiling water. Bleach and other disinfectants will not work. Wash your hands well with soap and water after cleaning.



Raccoon feces

