



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF  
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

Thomas Farley, MD, MPH *Commissioner*

## 2013 Veterinary Alert # 2 Raccoons in Staten Island Test Positive for Rabies

- Since January 2013, ten raccoons from Staten Island have tested positive for rabies to date this year.
- The raccoons have been collected from various neighborhoods including Eltingville, Grasmere, Great Kills, New Dorp, Park Hill, Tottenville and Westerleigh.
- DOHMH encourages veterinarians to ensure that their clients' pets are up-to-date for rabies vaccination, and to educate pet owners regarding rabies prevention.
- Veterinarians should consider rabies in the differential diagnosis for any patient with a history of exposure to a potentially rabid wild or feral animal, and/or if presenting with progressive neurologic disease.
- For current information on rabies and animals testing positive for rabies in NYC visit [www.nyc.gov/health/rabies](http://www.nyc.gov/health/rabies)

*Please share with your colleagues in Veterinary Medicine and your staff*

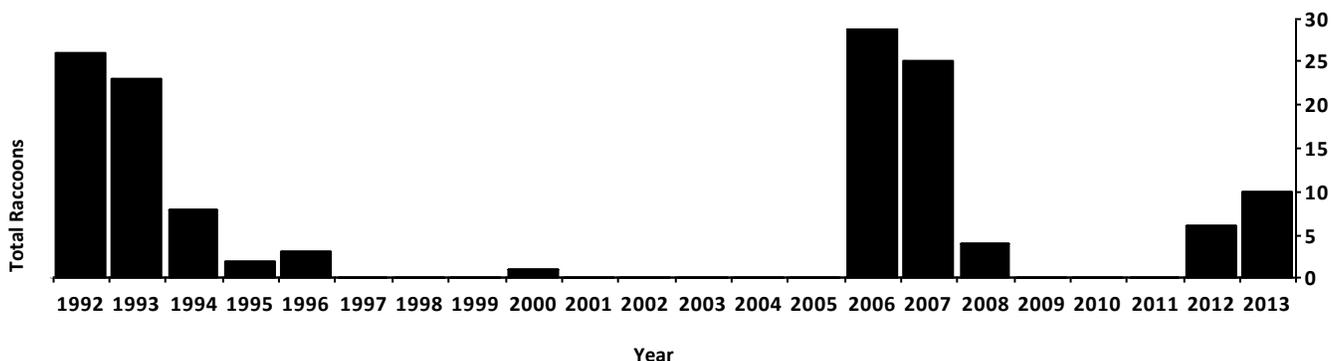
May 8, 2013

Dear Veterinary Colleagues,

The rabies laboratory at the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) Public Health Laboratory (PHL) has reported to date this year, a total of ten raccoons from Staten Island testing positive for rabies. This compares to last year when a total of six rabid raccoons were reported from Staten Island for all of 2012. The raccoons were found in the Staten Island neighborhoods of Eltingville, Grasmere, Great Kills, New Dorp, Park Hill, Tottenville and Westerleigh. All ten raccoons were collected and tested because they were either sick (8) or injured (2). None of the rabid raccoons had any reported contact with people or pets.

Several raccoon rabies epizootics have been identified in Staten Island, with this current epizootic starting last year. Previous epizootics ran from 2006 to 2008 and from 1992 (when raccoon rabies first appeared in NYC) through 1996. It is not clear whether we will continue to identify additional rabid raccoons from Staten Island through the year, but surveillance efforts will continue to monitor the situation. Other animals that have tested positive for rabies on Staten Island since 1992 have included 1 groundhog, 2 skunks, 2 opossums, 5 bats and 7 cats.

**Figure 1: Number of rabid raccoons reported from Staten Island, NY 1992-May 7, 2013**



**Rabies is most commonly spread to domestic animals by attacks from wild animals.** To date in 2013, the ten raccoons and one bat (also from Staten Island) are the only animals that have tested positive for rabies at the NYC DOHMH PHL Rabies Laboratory. Since 1992, when raccoon rabies first appeared in NYC, there have been 13 cats that have tested positive for rabies; 11 were strays. There has not been a rabid dog reported in NYC in over 55 years.

This is a reminder 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 or if there is a history in which the animal was exposed to a potentially rabid wild or feral animal (especially raccoons, skunks and bats).

#### Rabies Vaccination for Dogs and Cats

Maintaining vaccination against rabies is required for all dogs and cats in NYC. Any unvaccinated dog or cat that may have been exposed to a rabid animal is required to enter into six-month isolation in an approved facility or be euthanized. If a pet is up-to-date with its rabies vaccine but potentially exposed to a rabid animal, a booster vaccine should be given immediately, and the owner should be instructed to confine and observe the animal for 45 days in the owner's home. For questions pertaining to rabies exposure in pets, please contact the DOHMH Veterinary Public Health Services (VPHS) at 212-676-2120/2121 during business hours.

Any healthy pet dog or cat that has bitten or otherwise potentially exposed a person to rabies is required to be confined and observed by the owner (in most instances) for 10 days. If the animal is not currently vaccinated against rabies, vaccination should not occur until after the completion of the 10 day observation period. Animal bites are reportable to the DOHMH Veterinary Public Health Services Animal Bite Unit at 212-676-2483 during business hours (outside of business hours please call the Poison Control Center at 212-POISONS or 212-764-7667).

#### Primary or Preexposure Vaccination for Veterinarians and Veterinary Staff

Preexposure vaccination should be considered for veterinarians and any staff whose activities bring them into frequent contact with the rabies virus or potentially rabid bats, raccoons, skunks, cats, dogs, or other species at risk for having rabies. Preexposure prophylaxis is administered because it:

- Simplifies postexposure prophylaxis by eliminating the need for rabies immune globulin (RIG) and decreasing the number of doses of vaccine needed,
- Provides possible protection when post-exposure therapy is delayed, and
- Provides possible protection for exposure to rabies, such as a scratch or a bite that goes unrecognized or unreported.

The DOHMH does not offer rabies vaccine for either preexposure or postexposure vaccination. Persons interested in obtaining pre-exposure vaccination should contact their physician or a travel vaccination clinic.

Veterinarians and their staff who work directly with animals where animal rabies is enzootic, such as New York City, are considered to have frequent risk for exposure to rabies and should have a serum sample tested for rabies antibody every 2 years using the rapid fluorescent focus inhibition test (RFFIT). If the titer is less than complete neutralization at a 1:5 serum dilution by RFFIT, the person should receive a single booster dose of vaccine. Rabies titer testing by RFFIT is available through several commercial laboratories and Kansas State University.

Persons who are immunosuppressed may not mount an adequate immune response and should avoid activities for which rabies preexposure prophylaxis is indicated. When this is not possible, they should seek advice on how to approach obtaining rabies preexposure vaccination from their health care provider or contact the DOHMH Bureau of Communicable Disease for more information. See contact information below.

For questions about whether persons should receive rabies PEP, contact a health care provider or the DOHMH Bureau of Communicable Disease (BCD) at 347-396-2600 during business hours (outside of business hours, please call the Poison Control Center at 212-POISONS or 212-764-7667). For questions pertaining to rabies preexposure vaccination and titer testing, contact the DOHMH Bureau of Communicable Disease (BCD) at 347-396-2600 during business hours.

#### Additional Information

Additional information about rabies is available on the DOHMH website at <http://www.nyc.gov/health/rabies>, including summary data for New York City. DOHMH has also recently published a guide to human rabies prevention, available at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/chi/chi27-5.pdf>, as well as a poster containing information and algorithms on the management of pets exposed to rabies and pets that have bitten a human at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/zoo/zoo-vet-poster-2010.pdf>.

#### **What All Veterinarians Can Do**

- Educate clients to:
  - Avoid contact with wild animals 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 all suspected animal rabies cases to the DOHMH VPHS 212-676-2120/2483.
- Contact us for more information
  - Veterinary Public Health Services           212-676-2120
  - Bureau of Communicable Disease           347-396-2600
  - After Hours: NYC Poison Control Center   212-764-7667

As always, we greatly appreciate your partnership and cooperation.

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