



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
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Commissioner

2017 Veterinary Alert # 4 Potentially Rabid Squirrel in Prospect Park, Brooklyn

- Five concerning squirrel bite incidents occurred in Prospect Park in Brooklyn on July 18-20, 2017.
 - The squirrel in each incident acted very aggressively, highly unusual behavior in a squirrel that may indicate rabies.
- Veterinarians should treat any patient with a recent history of a squirrel bite or attack in Prospect Park as a potential rabies exposure.
- Veterinarians should ensure that their clients' pets are up-to-date for rabies vaccination and educate pet owners regarding rabies prevention.
- In 2017, to date, four animals have tested positive for rabies: 2 raccoons, 1 skunk, and a stray cat in the Bronx.
 - For current information on rabies and animals testing positive for rabies in NYC, visit www.nyc.gov/health/rabies

Please share with your colleagues in Veterinary Medicine and your staff

July 21, 2017

Dear Veterinary Colleagues,

On July 18-20th, a series of squirrel attacks occurred in Prospect Park in Brooklyn. Five people were bitten, including 3 people who received multiple bites, by a squirrel acting unusually aggressively. Although squirrels are not a typical rabies vector species, this behavior is exceedingly rare in a squirrel and highly suspicious for rabies. The squirrel has not been located for testing and rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is recommended for anyone bitten by a squirrel in Prospect Park since July 10th.

Animals with potential bites from a squirrel in Prospect Park since July 10th should also be treated as being exposed to rabies. ***Any dog or cat that was never vaccinated and may have been exposed to a rabid animal is required to either be euthanized or quarantined for up to six months in an approved facility under daily observation.*** Maintaining vaccination against rabies is required for all dogs and cats in New York City. 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. Pets that have had a rabies vaccination but are overdue for a booster vaccine should be immediately vaccinated and will be managed on a case by case basis. For questions pertaining to rabies exposure in pets, please contact the Health Department's Veterinary Public Health Services (VPHS) at 646-364-1783 during business hours.

To date in 2017, 4 animals tested positive for rabies at the Health Department's Public Health Laboratory, all from the Bronx: 1 skunk, 2 raccoons, and most recently, a stray cat. The cat bit a person and was tested for rabies after being found dead 2 days later. The bite victim is receiving rabies PEP. The Health Department

posted flyers in the Bronx to help find other potentially exposed cats in the neighborhood but none have been identified. Flyers will also be posted in Prospect Park to help identify people and pets recently attacked by a squirrel.

Rabies is most commonly spread to domestic animals by bites from wild animals, especially raccoons. Rabies infection in squirrels has rarely been reported and in general, rodents are not typically considered a rabies vector species. Rabies should be considered 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 (particularly a rabies vector species such as raccoons, skunks and bats). Since 1992 when raccoon rabies first appeared in NYC, there have been 15 cats that have tested positive for rabies, including the recent rabid cat; 13 were strays. There has not been a rabid dog reported in NYC in over 55 years.

As a reminder, 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 Health Department's Veterinary Public Health Services Animal Bite Unit at 646-364-1799 during business hours (outside of business hours, please call the Poison Control Center at 212-POISONS or 212-764-7667).

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 646-364-1783.
- Contact us for more information
 - Veterinary Public Health Services 646-364-1783
 - 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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