

Dartmouth raccoon tests positive for Rabies Virus

Earlier in the week Dartmouth Animal Control responded to a residence in the vicinity of Fisher Pines Way for an incident involving a raccoon and a person. On May 21, 2019, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health advised the Town of Dartmouth Board of Health and Dartmouth Animal Control that the raccoon tested positive for having the rabies virus. Additional raccoons have tested positive for rabies in the adjacent Town of Westport this year.

Rabies is fairly common in Massachusetts with over 5,000 animals testing positive since 1992. Most cases involved wild animals such as raccoons, skunks, bats, woodchucks and foxes but every year some pets, especially cats and farms animals also contract the rabies virus.

The rabies virus is a serious disease that affects the central nervous system in all mammals. Bats, cats, coyotes, dogs, foxes, skunks and woodchucks are a few examples of common mammals to this area. The rabies virus is usually a disease found in animals but it can transmit to humans from an infected animal.

Rabies is spread when an infected animal bites another animal or person. The saliva of the infected animal contains the rabies virus. Rabies infection can also occur when saliva from an infected animal gets into a scratch or other wound, the eyes, nose or mouth of a person or animal.

While contracting the rabies virus is almost always fatal, it is also 100% preventable. A few simple steps can safeguard from this deadly virus.

- Contact your physician immediately if you have been in contact with wildlife.

- Notify Dartmouth Animal Control of wildlife that exhibits strange behavior.
- Keep vaccinations up to date for cats and dogs.
- Assure children and adults do not approach wildlife.
- DO NOT handle any wildlife including babies or young.
- Leave the handling of wildlife to professionals. Only licensed wildlife rehabilitators and problem animal control agents can handle wildlife that is not sick.
- Do not feed your pets outside. Even an empty bowl will attract wildlife.
- Keep pets leashed or within a fenced yard and do not allow to roam freely.
- Keep garbage contained in barrels with tight-fitting covers.
- Exclude wildlife from entering your home with a chimney caps and repair any holes that allow wildlife to enter your home.

Residents are urged to report any human or pet contact with wildlife to Dartmouth Animal Control by calling 508-910-1840, or to contact the Dartmouth Police Department at 508-910-1735.