



**HEALTH
DEPARTMENT**
Public Health Unit

DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH- Linda Beers, MPH
DEPUTY DIRECTOR/DIRECTOR OF HEALTH
PROMOTION & PLANNING- Jessica Darney Buehler, MPH

May 6, 2026

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Essex County Confirms First Case of Rabies in 2026

Elizabethtown, NY. A raccoon in Westport has tested positive for rabies. The animal was observed acting abnormally and stumbling down a roadway on Tuesday, May 5, before it was found dead on a resident's property. Because a pet was believed to have had contact with the raccoon, the Essex County Health Department (ECHD) provided the homeowner with safe handling instructions to prepare the animal for testing. The specimen was taken to the Adirondack Veterinary Hospital for preparation and submitted to the NYSDOH Wadsworth Laboratory.

The testing lab notified ECHD of the positive result this morning, Wednesday, May 6.

This case follows a year in which Essex County saw nine total lab-confirmed cases in 2025. Those cases included a skunk and raccoon in Elizabethtown; a raccoon in Essex; a grey fox in Jay; a raccoon and a bat in Westport; a woodchuck and raccoon in Ticonderoga; and a skunk in Willsboro. This is the first animal to test positive for rabies in Essex County so far in 2026.

ECHD staff conducted an investigation and confirmed the pet involved was current on its rabies vaccination at the time of the encounter. Following protocol for a positive exposure, the owners were advised to seek a rabies booster for the pet; that booster was successfully completed today, Wednesday, May 6.

Linda Beers, Director of Public Health at ECHD, reminds residents that these efforts work alongside pet vaccinations to keep the community safe. "Because this pet was up to date on its rabies vaccine, it has the best possible protection against the virus. This incident is a perfect example of why we prioritize our free rabies vaccine clinics; staying current on vaccines ensures the safety of your animals and limits the potential for virus transmission to people," stated Beers.

Jessica Darney Buehler, Deputy Director & Director of Health Planning and Promotion for ECHD, noted that as spring progresses and wildlife becomes more active, the department typically sees an increase in reported cases. "This is the time of year when we often see a rise in rabies cases, which is why the USDA Wildlife Services oral rabies vaccine (ORV) bait drops are so timely," states Darney Buehler. "Starting on or around May 6, vaccine baits will be distributed via aircraft across the northeastern portion of the county to maintain a protective barrier in our local wildlife. These baits are safe for animals, but if found, they should be left undisturbed whenever possible."



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More information about rabies prevention can be viewed on the ECHD website at:

<https://health.essexcountyny.gov/communicable-disease-control/rabies-center/>

To learn more about rabies bait drops – a program of the USDA APHIS Wildlife Services, go to:

<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/national-wildlife-programs/rabies>

To view the 2026 Rabies Clinic Schedule and register your pets, go to

<https://health.essexcountyny.gov/rabies-clinics/>

The next opportunity to vaccinate your pets for free is tomorrow, Thursday, May 7, from 6-7:30PM at the Jay Fire Department.

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