



**HEALTH
DEPARTMENT**
Public Health Unit

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

May 7, 2024

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For More Information:

Andrea Whitmarsh, MPH – Program Coordinator, Essex County Health Department
518-873-3546 | andrea.whitmarsh@essexcountyny.gov

Two more cases of rabies reported in Essex County in separate incidents

Elizabethtown, NY. A woodchuck found in Port Henry (town of Moriah) tested positive for rabies on Friday, May 3, 2024. The animal was dispatched by law enforcement earlier in the week after being found unresponsive. The Essex County Health Department (ECHD) provided instructions for safe collection and submission of the animal, working with Adirondack Veterinary Clinic in Westport to ship the specimen to Wadsworth Laboratory for testing.

Two additional incidents with wildlife prompted rabies response activities late last week as well.

A porcupine displaying unusual behavior and acting aggressively at a residence in the town of Essex was terminated due to the danger it posed to people and pets.

A resident of New Russia (town of Elizabethtown) found a deceased raccoon on their property. An ill looking raccoon had recently been spotted in the area and reported to authorities, but had not been located despite NYS DEC attempts to find the animal. While it is not possible to confirm that this is the same raccoon, there is a high likelihood the incidents are connected.

ECHD again coordinated with Adirondack Veterinary Clinic for specimen submissions of the porcupine and raccoon to Wadsworth. No human, pet, or livestock exposures were reported in any of the three latest incidents (woodchuck, porcupine, or raccoon).

The raccoon specimen returned positive for rabies today, May 7 and the porcupine specimen tested negative. Four animals have tested positive for rabies so far in 2024, including the woodchuck and raccoon this week. Two skunks found in Westport tested positive in April.

“Local health departments in New York State have a responsibility to promptly investigate reports of possible exposures of rabies to people, pets and domestic livestock, and make the public aware of rabies risk within the community,” stated Jessica Darney Buehler, Director of Health Promotion and Planning at ECHD. “Even in incidents where there is no exposure to the animal, we may submit it for rabies testing if available, helping us get a better picture of where rabies cases are occurring in Essex County, which species are being impacted, and the type of rabies variant that is causing disease,” noted Buehler.



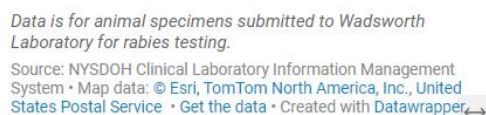
"It is often difficult to determine what might be causing an animal to act out of character for their species or to say why or how it died, if found deceased," explained Linda Beers, Director of Public Health at ECHD. "In instances where there has not been any contact with the animal, and depending on capacity at ECHD, NYS DEC, and the vet clinics we work with, we might recommend burying the [deceased] animal or allowing it to wander off. Of the 15 animal specimens submitted so far this year, four have been positive for rabies; of the 90 submitted last year, 13 were positive. So, it's frequently the case that the animal is not rabid," reassured Beers, "but the state sanitary code requires every person having knowledge of an animal exhibiting signs suggestive of rabies to report immediately to the local health department so we can investigate".

Public health law in New York State also requires every dog, cat and domesticated ferret be actively immunized against rabies by four months of age. “We want to remind residents that feeding stray/feral cats is considered an action of ownership,” cautioned Buehler. “That action confers responsibility to the person feeding the cat to ensure it is vaccinated against rabies.”

The Health Department offers free rabies clinics through the county several times each year to help people meet rabies vaccination requirements.

The 2024 Rabies Clinic Schedule is available at essexcountyny.gov/health.

Essex County Rabies Cases by Town - 2023



Data is for animal specimens submitted to Wadsworth Laboratory for rabies testing.

Source: NYSDOH Clinical Laboratory Information Management System • Map data: © Esri, TomTom North America, Inc., United States Postal Service • Get the data • Created with Datawrapper

Note: Maps include zip code delineations; however, cases are reported at the town level. For example, a case in New Russia is reported as occurring in the town of Elizabethtown.