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## **Update: Raccoon Rabies** Hamilton Ontario

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**December 10, 2015**

On December 2, 2015, a sick raccoon in Hamilton ON had a significant altercation with two dogs. The raccoon was euthanized and tested for rabies as a precaution. Test results were received on December 4, and were positive for rabies (raccoon variant). Subsequent surveillance testing of wildlife carcasses collected by municipal animal services in the preceding weeks confirmed three additional positive raccoons with raccoon-variant rabies on December 9.

**These are the first cases of raccoon-variant rabies ever detected in Southwestern Ontario.** The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) annually distributes wildlife rabies vaccine baits along the US border in the Niagara region and along the St. Lawrence River in order to help protect wildlife from incursions of raccoon-variant rabies from New York State. As of December 7, the MNRF has initiated hand and aerial baiting in the Hamilton area where the positive raccoons were found.

This is a reminder to veterinarians, particularly in Hamilton and Niagara regions, to remain vigilant for cases of domestic animal exposure to potentially rabid animals. The last case of raccoon-variant rabies in Ontario was detected in 2005, and the last case of fox-variant rabies was detected in 2013. However, there continues to be a risk of incursion of fox rabies from northern regions of the province and of raccoon rabies from New York State. Contact with rabid bats also remains a risk in all regions.

The best protection against rabies for both domestic animals and people is to avoid contact with potentially rabid wildlife and to keep domestic animals up-to-date on rabies vaccination. Rabies vaccination for dogs and cats is a regulatory requirement in most of the province. If you suspect a domestic animal may have recently been exposed to a potentially rabid animal, it should be vaccinated (or revaccinated) as soon as possible if it isn't possible to have the offending animal tested.

### **Reminder of who to call in cases of potential rabies exposure:**

- 1. Human exposure to a potentially rabid animal → Local Public Health (PH) Unit**
- 2. Domestic animal exposure to a potentially rabid animal, NO human exposure → Local veterinarian / OMAFRA**
  - Animal owners should be directed to contact their local veterinarian as the first step for any animal health concerns.
  - Veterinarians can call the OMAFRA Agricultural Information Contact Centre: 1-877-424-1300 for assistance.
- 3. Abnormal wildlife, NO domestic animal exposure, NO human exposure → MNRF or CWHC**
  - For terrestrial wildlife, call the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) Rabies Hotline: 1-888-574-6656.
  - If a sick or injured bat is found, consider contacting the Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative (CWHC) at 1-866-673-4781.

### **Additional information for the public & veterinarians:**

OMAFRA Rabies in Ontario website:

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/food/inspection/ahw/rabies.htm>

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