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Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Rabies Identified in Raccoon in Easthampton

On Friday, September 10, 2021, the Health Department was notified of one human and two domestic pet exposures to a possible rabid raccoon. The raccoon was sent to the MA Rabies Lab for rabies testing and on Monday, September 13, 2021, the Health Department was notified that the raccoon was positive for rabies. Later on Monday, the Health Department was notified of another human exposure to a possible rabid raccoon. The second raccoon will also be sent to the MA Rabies Lab for testing. Results from this raccoon are expected either Wednesday or Thursday of this week. Both exposures happened in the areas of Clark St. and East Greene St.

Rabies is a very serious disease that affects the brain and spinal cord of mammals (if an animal has hair or fur, it is a mammal). Rabies is caused by a virus and almost always causes death. Rabies spreads when an animal with rabies bites another animal or person. The rabies virus is in the saliva (spit) of infected animals. Infected animals can also spread rabies if their saliva gets into a scratch or other wound, or the eyes, nose or mouth of another person or animal. Most cases occur in wild animals like raccoons, skunks, bats, woodchucks and foxes, but every year some pets (especially cats) and farm animals also get rabies.

You cannot tell if an animal has rabies just by looking at it. Rabid animals may act strangely after the virus affects their brains, or they may seem fine. Sometimes, rabid animals may aggressively attack people or other animals.

Please do not handle, approach, or feed any wildlife. If you or your pet comes into contact with wildlife, contact the Easthampton Police Department on their non-emergency line: (413) 527-1212.

If you or your pet have come into contact (bite, scratch, consuming viscera, etc.) with wildlife:

- Contact Easthampton Police Department to respond to your location. Any wildlife exposures to people or domestic pets need to be tested for rabies, if the wildlife is available. **Please note that testing of wildlife is NOT required unless there was a**

known exposure (i.e. bite, scratch, consuming viscera, domestic pets fighting with wildlife, etc.). Animal Control will NOT take and test wildlife unless an exposure has occurred.

- Wash the wound with soap and water **right away** for ten minutes.
- Call your primary health care provider or local veterinarian immediately **and** local Health Department.

Pet owners need to be particularly aware of rabies. Wild animals are known to expose domesticated pets to the disease during fights or other interactions. Fortunately, there are some practical solutions to protect your pets against rabies:

- **Vaccinate Pets** — The rabies vaccine for dogs, cats, and ferrets is a requirement under Massachusetts law. Contact your veterinarian to ensure vaccinations are up to date. In rare cases of exposure, unvaccinated pets or other animals may have to be euthanized.
- **Keep Pets Close** — Always watch pets when they are outdoors and keep them away from wildlife. Use a leash, keep pets in fenced areas, and never let them roam free.
- **Spay and Neuter** — The CDC suggests spaying and neutering pets to reduce the potential for unwanted animals without vaccinations.
- **Keep Wildlife Wild** — Never keep a wild animal as a pet. For the most part, it is illegal in Massachusetts.
- **Secure Property** — Bring all outdoor water or food bowls inside, cover garbage, and repair holes in chimneys, cellars, porches, and other areas. This will keep wildlife away from your property and out of your home.