



**Public Health**  
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## ***MEDIA RELEASE***

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### **Rabid skunk found near Brush**

The Northeast Colorado Health Department has confirmed that a rabid skunk was found in northeast Colorado near Brush, leading local health officials to urge area residents to be on their guard and to make sure their pets are vaccinated against rabies.

“A strain of skunk rabies has been circulating in this area for the past couple of years,” said Carmen Vandebark, NCHD’s environmental health director. “The strain appears to be endemic to this region, meaning the potential for exposure of this deadly disease to humans, family pets and other wildlife is increasing.”

The skunk in question was found near Brush on Jan. 11, and came into contact with several domesticated dogs.

“It’s very concerning when family pets come in contact with rabid animals, particularly if those pets don’t have a current rabies vaccination,” said Vandebark.

“Pets that are exposed are at risk of not only acquiring the disease but also passing it on

to other animals and humans. How high that risk is depends upon their vaccination status.”

According to state statute an animal that is current on its rabies vaccination that comes into contact with a rabid animal will need to be immediately re-vaccinated and placed under home observation for 45 days. Pets that have an expired vaccination that have at least two or more documented rabies vaccinations are immediately re-vaccinated, placed under a 90-day home quarantine, and re-vaccinated in 30 days after the initial dose. For pets that don't fall into either of these categories, the recommended course of action is euthanasia. While state statute does allow for pet owners to bypass that recommendation, it comes at a hefty expense. A mandatory 180-day quarantine is required, the first 90 days of which the animal must be isolated at a secured facility, at the expense of the owner.

“Unfortunately in this instance, none of the dogs that were involved in the attack from the rabid skunk were vaccinated,” said Vandebark. “It's these types of situations that really highlight the importance of having your pets up-to-date on their rabies vaccine, because if that were the case, these dogs would have been revaccinated and placed under home observation. But because that wasn't the case, this pet owner has to make a decision that has serious emotional and financial consequences.

“Rabies is a very dangerous disease that's almost always fatal once clinical signs appear,” continued Vandebark. “When it comes to protecting peoples' lives, we can't take any chances if there is a risk of exposure.”

Vandebark said that local regulations require every owner or keeper of a dog or cat have their animal vaccinated against rabies and animal owners should contact their veterinarians immediately to ensure that their pets are up to date on their rabies vaccination. For pet owners that need to update their pets' vaccinations, the Morgan County Humane Society will be holding several low-cost rabies vaccination clinics every

Friday and Saturday during the month of February. For more information or to schedule an appointment call 970-542-6416.

Rabies is a virus that affects the nervous system of humans and other mammals, resulting in a fatal disease. If acquired, the virus is present in saliva and in nervous system tissue (brain, spinal cord). The most common route of rabies transmission is from the bite or scratch of a rabid animal; however, transmission can also occur through contact with saliva or nervous system tissue of a rabid animal with mucus membranes (eyes, nose, mouth), or an open cut or wound. Pets can also be exposed to the virus if they bite a rabid animal and are exposed to infected saliva or nervous system fluid or tissue.

Signs of rabies in animals include abnormal behavior like being active in the day for nocturnal species; approaching humans or animals; aggressive behavior; difficulty with walking or movement; and unusual vocalization. If you witness a suspected a rabid skunk or other wild animal contact the Division of Wildlife 970-842-6300.

To prevent possible exposure to rabies, health experts warn residents to keep their pets' vaccinations up-to-date; leave wildlife alone and, if they suspect a family member or pet has been bitten or scratched, contact a medical provider or local veterinarian immediately.

For more information contact NCHD at (970) 522-3741, or visit the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's website at [www.cdphe.state.co.us](http://www.cdphe.state.co.us).