For Immediate Release

Another rabies-confirmed raccoon found in Monongalia County

MORGANTOWN, WV (March 8, 2019) — For the second time in a month, another raccoon has tested positive for rabies. It was found in the same area—Tyrone Avery Road in Cheat Lake—as another rabies-positive raccoon that was collected on Feb. 7.

A homeowner arrived home Tuesday to find a dead raccoon in the yard with his two dogs. The dogs had been contained in the yard by an invisible fence. The raccoon was sent away for testing on Wednesday and it was confirmed to be positive for rabies on Thursday.

The dogs had previously been vaccinated for rabies but were not up to date on their shots. They were re-vaccinated and will be confined and observed for 45 days.

“This is a good reminder that people and animals can be exposed to rabies any time of year,” said Dr. Diane K. Gross, MCHD’s regional epidemiologist for a seven-county region.

It’s also a good reason to get your pets vaccinated against rabies if they haven’t been already. Not only is it the law, but also, humans are more likely to interact with an unvaccinated dog or cat that has been bitten or scratched by a rabid animal than they are to interact with a raccoon or bat.

This is the second rabies-confirmed case of 2019. Last year, Monongalia County didn’t have a positive rabies case until June.

A raccoon that was collected Thursday, Feb. 7 on property in the Cheat Lake area tested positive for rabies. Two dogs killed a raccoon that was behaving oddly on their owners’ property on Tyrone Avery Road. The owner cleaned up her dogs, which had been vaccinated for rabies, and bagged up the raccoon and took it to the Monongalia County Canine Adoption Center.
From there, it was sent away to the state lab for testing. The dogs were re-vaccinated and were to be confined and observed for 45 days. The owner, who was possibly exposed to rabies, was undergoing rabies post-exposure prophylaxis treatment.

MCHD urges everyone to avoid animals they do not know, including raccoons and bats. These are wild animals that can carry rabies. This warning applies year-round. While more encounters tend to happen in warmer months, these two incidents prove that raccoons are not deterred by snow and cold.

In 2018, Monongalia County Health Department had four confirmed cases of rabies: two in raccoons that had encounters with pets and two involving cats. Three of the incidents took place in the National area and one occurred on Grafton Road. The U.S. Department of Agriculture confirmed another five cases of rabid animals, none of which had contact with any humans or domesticated animals.

“Maybe it was road kill or someone called them about a raccoon in their yard,” said Jon W. Welch, manager of MCHD’s Environmental Health program.

Although they may look harmless, raccoons can be a nuisance and, in some cases, downright dangerous. This is especially true if they are infected with rabies, a viral disease found in mammals that attacks the nervous system, ultimately causing disease in the brain and death, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (cdc.gov). Other mammals can be infected via the saliva of a rabid animal through a bite or a scratch.

Early symptoms of rabies in people are similar to other illnesses, such as fever, headache and general weakness and discomfort. As the disease progresses, more specific symptoms include insomnia, anxiety, confusion, slight or partial paralysis, excitation, hallucinations, agitation, hypersalivation (an increase in saliva), difficulty swallowing and fear of water. Death usually occurs within days of the onset of these symptoms.

Raccoons are creatures of habit and live in all areas of the county, including in downtown areas. Once they make a home, they will return. Evidence of raccoon activity includes garbage cans tipped over, garbage scattered all over and raccoon droppings. Raccoons can cause damage to attics or roofs when they try to enter a home.

The best deterrent to raccoon activity is prevention. Raccoons will look for homes where food is easy to find. MCHD urges residents to take the following measures to deter raccoons and avoid rabies:

**Keep pets’ rabies vaccinations up to date.** If a domesticated animal becomes infected with rabies, the animal may expose any human with whom it comes into contact. The
affected animal must be put down and humans who have had contact with the animal would need to seek immediate medical treatment.

**Seal garbage cans tight.** Raccoons have opposable thumbs and can remove any loose or broken lids. The best garbage cans have lids that lock into place with handles or clamps. If necessary, keep garbage cans inside a secure building.

**Don’t feed raccoons.** Feed outside pets during the day and don’t leave food or water dishes outside after dark when raccoons are likely to be looking for food and water. Raccoons have been known to fight cats and dogs—which should be vaccinated for rabies—for their food.

**Control access to the home.** Blocking off access to a home is the best raccoon deterrent. Inspect houses thoroughly to find any holes or crevices where raccoons could enter. They can get through surprisingly small spaces. This includes chimneys, attic vents and seams along roofs and baseboards. Block any spaces with sheet metal or heavy screening. Consider hiring a professional to look for and cover these spaces.

**Watch out for raccoons or other strange animals that are active** during the day, move erratically and/or are not afraid of humans. They may have rabies. If you suspect there is a rabid raccoon on your property, contact a licensed animal control specialist.

**Scare tactics don’t work.** Banging pots and pans may be a temporary raccoon deterrent, but raccoons are persistent. They will come back long after you’ve given up. Water-sprayer raccoon deterrents are also widely available. They hook up to your hose and use a motion detector to scare off raccoons. They will work for as long as it takes raccoons to find a way around them.

**Catching a baby raccoon and keeping it as a pet** is against the law. The DNR stopped issuing pet permits for raccoons in 2006 because of the potential risk of rabies.

For additional information about rabies, visit MCHD’s website, monchd.org, or contact MCHD’s Environmental Health program at 304-598-5131.

For more information on MCHD, check out monchd.org and follow us on Facebook and Twitter @WVMCHD for up-to-date information on health and safety.

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