

# Halton issues warning about raccoon rabies

By Karen Smith  
SPECIAL TO THE BEAVER

The Halton Regional Health Department is warning citizens about the dangers of rabies after an unprecedented case was recently discovered in a raccoon in Eastern Ontario.

As a raccoon rabies epidemic in the United States appears to have crept into Canada for the first time, local residents should be more aware of the risks to people and their pets, said Dave Stronach of the Halton Regional Health Department.

While there's no reason to believe that raccoon rabies is present in any other part of Ontario, the recent case is a reminder for citizens to take safety precautions, he said.

He said pet owners should ensure their dogs and cats are vaccinated against the disease, which they must be by law. Children should be warned to stay away from wild or stray animals.

Stronach said people should try to stop wild animals from living in their homes or on their property. But he warned citizens not to attempt to trap nuisance raccoons themselves.

Contact the Oakville Humane Society for advice or hire a commercial service to remove all raccoons, he said.

"Don't trap and take nuisance raccoons to a new location," he said. "You could help spread the disease."

He warned citizens not to keep wildlife, including raccoons, as pets. It's against the law.

He added that citizens should report any animals behaving strangely to the humane society. Don't touch dead or sick animals.

And most importantly, anyone who has been in contact with a rabid animal should immediately call their doctor or the Halton Regional Health Department at 825-6060.

A raccoon that died of rabies was found about 10 km north of Prescott, prompting the Ministry of Natural Resources to implement a vaccination program to try to stop the killer virus in its tracks.

Raccoons in Canada have previously contracted fox rabies, but this virus from raccoons in the U.S. is of a different strain — one of several variations of the disease.

All raccoons found in the immediate area of the rabid raccoon near Prescott

were captured and euthenized while those in the surrounding area were trapped, immunized and released.

Halton has a similar contingency plan, Stronach said, but it wouldn't be put in place unless raccoon rabies was discovered here.

The ministry's baiting and immunization program has been successful in drastically reducing rabies in area foxes — the most common carriers of the disease.

In part of the program, oral vaccines specifically for foxes were combined with beef fat and other substances and dropped from airplanes to be gobbled up by the animals — a method that has helped reduce the problem from thousands of cases in Ontario to 100.

But no oral vaccine is currently available in Canada for raccoon rabies, said Barry Radford of the ministry's rabies research unit. One is currently being developed but could take two to three years to produce.

He said despite efforts to stamp out rabies at provincial U.S.-Canada borders by hand, the disease snuck through an area not vigorously protected.

The main focus of efforts by both countries centred around high risk areas like Niagara Falls, Radford said.

If raccoon rabies isn't stopped in Ontario, it will "spread like wildfire," said Dr. Rick Rosatte, a ministry research scientist in Peterborough.

But there's hope. He said the ministry has purchased 50 litres of an oral vaccine for raccoon rabies from the U.S. It's never been tried in Canada and the ministry is currently seeking permission to use it.

It will cost \$35,000 to purchase the vaccine and \$25,000 to make the bait to be dropped from airplanes. The 50 litres will cover a 10 km perimeter, Rosatte said.

Radford added that both town and rural residents are at risk of run-ins with rabies since raccoons — nocturnal animals that take delight in raiding garbage cans — have become urbanized.

Spread by the bite of an infected animal, rabies is most often carried by foxes, skunks, raccoons and bats. The virus enters the nerves in the wound and travels toward the brain.

It can spread to humans, especially from infected pets, and if not treated promptly can result in death. Several people die from rabies every year.



Photo by Peter C. McCusker

**GRILLING FOR THE UNITED WAY:** David Corcoran, Siobhan Keating and David Langdon barbecued and sold about 100 Dietrich's sausages and raised about \$275 for the Oakville United Way over the long weekend at the annual Charity BBQ at Dietrich's Butcher & Deli Shoppe on Speers Rd. Last year's event raised \$300.

*If you see news happening, call 845-3824*

## Irish Classics

is getting a ...

### NEW LOOK for the "NEW MILLENNIUM"

You can help our renovation SALE starting Tomorrow with savings

up to **70% OFF**

Hurry in for best selection

88 Dunn St. Downtown Oakville  
338-7160

## STARS SIDEWALK SALE



★ STARS ★  
★ MEN'S SHOPS ★

WOOL & BLENDS  
**SUITS**  
Compare at \$495  
**2 FOR \$200**

**SPORT JACKETS**  
Compare at \$350  
**2 FOR \$200**

PURE COTTON  
**SHORTS**  
Compare at \$60  
**FROM \$19.99**

POLO, CREW & V-NECK  
**KNITS**  
REG. \$45 EACH  
**2 FOR \$35**

WOOL & BLENDS  
**DRESS PANTS**  
REG. TO \$125 EACH  
**2 FOR \$80**

DESIGNER  
**SPORT SHIRTS**  
REG. TO \$85  
**2 FOR \$40**

Oakville Place Mall  
339-0180  
www.starsmenshops.com



## ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO READ A NEWSPAPER

We owe our children the greatest education we can give them, and encouraging them to read a newspaper is an important part of that education. Open a door of entertainment, wonder and knowledge for your children by encouraging them to begin a practice they will enjoy for the rest of their lives.

### THE OAKVILLE BEAVER

*It all starts with newspaper.*