





In a report to the regions Health and Social Services Committee on Tuesday, March 21, the Halton Region Health Department says there have been 10 cases (seven raccoons and three skunks) of raccoon strain rabies in Halton Region, from Oct. 4, 2016, to Feb. 13, 2017.

Photo by John Stewart

Raccoon rabies increasing in Halton

residents to use care and caution to help protect themselves and pets from rabies.

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This particular outbreak is spreading, said Matthew Ruf, acting commissioner of health. Any wild animal can carry rabies.

Over the last 20 years, the incidence of rabies in wild and domestic animal populations has decreased significantly in Halton Region. In 2016, Halton Health says there were 10 rabies cases, a number that hasn t been observed since the early 1990s.

Raccoon strain rabies had not been seen in Ontario since 2005. Halton Health believes the strain was reintroduced to Ontario by an infected raccoon that was inadvertently transported, possibly on a transport truck, from New York State. Rabies is a viral disease that can be transmitted to humans through a bite or scratch, or when the rabies virus comes in contact with mucous membranes like the tissues of the mouth, nose or eyes.

Rabies is virtually 100 per cent fatal once the disease produces symptoms in humans. The goal of Halton's rabies prevention and control program is to maintain the incidence of rabies in the human population at zero.

Public health inspectors respond to all reported incidents,

The Region of Halton is calling for in which humans were bitten or scratched by an animal.

> In 2016, there were 1.013 reported incidents of human to animal exposures investigated in Halton, which is a 14-per-cent increase over the average number of reported incidents each year between 2011 and 2015.

> The response can include confining animals involved in the incident, sending specimens for testing, delivering vaccine to physicians and ensuring rabies vaccination for cats and dogs involved in the investigations are current.

> Public health inspectors also conduct surveillance, provide education and communicate the risk of rabies to the public. Ruf says Halton Health has used several approaches to provide education and communicate the risk of rabies by:

- · Providing information about raccoon strain rabies to local physicians, veterinarians and animal control service;
- Distributing information packages to schools, pet stores, veterinarian offices and other pet related businesses in the Aldershot area of Burlington, which is where the 10 raccoon strain rabies cases have been identified:
- · Updating the region's web page to include current information on raccoon strain rabies cases and continues to be updated with the current number and location of
- · Distributing media releases to increase awareness of raccoon strain rabies cases and to promote preventive measures among the general public.

Marta Marychuk



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