

## Rabies Alert in Frankestown

Kay Anderson, Health Officer

I received an email on April 18<sup>th</sup> from the NH DHHS, Division of Public Health Services notifying me that **The Public Health Lab had received a raccoon from the area of Scobie Road in Frankestown that had tested positive for rabies.** As so many of us make use of the local conservation lands for hiking and walking our dogs, I wanted to pass on this information from the State Health Promotion Advisor .

Rabies is a viral disease that attacks the central nervous system. It can be transmitted to people through contact with the saliva or brain and spinal cord tissue of a rabid animal. It is a fatal disease for humans but may be effectively prevented. Rabies in certain animals, especially wildlife, is common throughout New Hampshire.

### **What are the signs of rabies in animals?**

Animals may act friendly or become vicious. Animals that are usually active only at night may be found active during the day. Animal behavior may be unusually aggressive. Animals infected may seem withdrawn, hide in corners or refuse food. The most important thing to remember is that a rabid animal will usually be infectious to people or other animals for a varying period of time before a change in their appearance or behavior.

### **What is the treatment?**

If a person is bitten or has a non-bite exposure, immediately wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water for several minutes. A non-bite exposure is defined as infectious saliva, brain or spinal cord tissue coming into contact with the lining of a person's eye, nose or mouth or with any pre-existing break in the person's skin. (NOTE: flush an exposed eye, nose or mouth with water or saline). This is extremely important as it may prevent the rabies virus from entering the body tissue and prevent infection. Then the person should be seen immediately by a physician or go to an emergency room for examination and possible treatment.

### **How can the spread of this disease be prevented?**

1. Do not handle wild animals. Teach children to avoid wildlife, strays and all other animals they don't know. Call the local Animal Control Officer (547-3509) or the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department at (603) 271-3361 to report dead, sick or injured animals.
2. If bitten by a wild or domestic animal, seek medical attention immediately and notify the local Animal Control Officer.
3. All bites by wild animal or contact with their saliva or brain or spinal cord tissue should be considered a possible exposure to rabies and must be evaluated medically.
4. Keep trash containers tightly closed. Garbage attracts animals like skunks and raccoons.
5. **Vaccinate all dogs and cats against rabies and make sure their shots are up to date.**
6. If another animal has injured a dog, cat or other pet, handle it only with thick rubber gloves and have it examined by a veterinarian right away. Saliva from an attacking rabid animal remains infectious on your pet's fur until it has been thoroughly dried.

### **Reportable?**

Yes. Rabies in animals and humans is reportable by New Hampshire law to the Division of Public Health Services, Infectious Disease Investigation Section at (603) 271-4496 or (800) 852-3345 ext 4496.