



Raccoons with Distemper

We are advising towns within Essex County that there is an increase in the number of calls we have responded to for sick raccoons. Many of the raccoons are exhibiting signs consistent with the Canine Distemper virus. The Canine Distemper Virus is generally always present in the raccoon population, however usually at low levels. In the Fall and during mild Winter conditions, distemper cases in raccoons tend to spike. When infected, raccoons may approach people or curl up to sleep in open areas close to people. Generally they act disoriented or lethargic but **can become aggressive if cornered**.

Frequently asked questions:

What is Canine distemper? Canine distemper is a viral disease affecting animals' gastrointestinal, respiratory and nervous systems. Raccoons are pre-disposed to this disease as are dogs but it commonly infects skunks as well.

Can I catch distemper? Can my dog catch it? Canine distemper does not pose a threat to humans, however, dogs who have not been vaccinated for distemper can become infected if they come into contact with an infected raccoon. Distemper is a routine vaccination given by a vet included in regular yearly vaccinations. Puppies who have not yet been vaccinated are at particularly high risk. To keep your pet safe, it is best to keep your dog on a leash when on walks and scan your property before letting your dog out.

What are symptoms of distemper? Raccoons with distemper tend to move slowly and may stumble as they walk. They lose fear of humans. They may appear blind and confused and may wander aimlessly. A mucus discharge is often present around the eyes and nose and the animal may cough, vomit, have seizures, diarrhea, tremors or chewing fits. Otherwise, they may appear quite healthy. Distemper IS NOT rabies although some symptoms are similar.

What do I do if I see a raccoon like this? If residents notice a raccoon displaying abnormal behaviour in the Town of Lakeshore, they should contact a private trapper, Wings Wildlife Rehab or Erie Wildlife Rescue.

Can we help the raccoons? Once a raccoon is infected, there is little to no chance of survival for the animal. It can take several weeks for the disease to run its course. The best way to help an infected animal is to contact one of the agencies above who will ensure that the animal is humanely taken care of and does not continue to suffer or spread the infection.

What else can I do to help? Please do not feed or leave food out for raccoons and that may only attract other wildlife or sick raccoons to areas that pets frequent. At this time, it is advisable to take down any bird feeders, or regularly clean up the area around the bird feeder so you do not attract raccoons. Ensure all garbage is disposed of properly. Explain to your children why they should NOT approach

raccoons or any wildlife even if they seem docile. Make sure your dog has been vaccinated against distemper.

How are the towns helping? The municipalities are sharing information with residents, veterinarians and pet stores to help spread the correct information in addition to working closely with Essex County Animal Control Services.

If residents in the Town of Lakeshore encounter a raccoon displaying these behaviours, they should contact a private trapper, Wings Wildlife Rehab or Erie Wildlife Rescue.