



# Canine Distemper in Raccoons in Alberta 2015

*A localized outbreak of canine distemper in raccoons occurred in Lethbridge in April and May 2015. In Alberta, occasional distemper outbreaks occur in coyotes, skunks, and now raccoons, particularly in high-density local populations. Risk to pets is limited; however, preventative vaccination is always a good precaution. There is no risk to humans.*

## *The following outlines the outbreak:*

In mid-April staff at the Helen Schuler Nature Centre in the Old Man River valley in Lethbridge received reports of a raccoon 'acting strange'. A dead raccoon was found near the Centre the next day. Given that rabies infection is always a concern when unusual behaviour of wildlife is reported, the Centre staff contacted the **provincial rabies hotline - 1-844-427-6847**.

This began a cascade of communication that involved the Alberta Public Health Veterinarian with AB Agriculture, the Provincial Wildlife Disease Specialist with AB Fish and Wildlife Policy, and the City of Lethbridge.

Reports of another 8 or 9 sick or dead raccoons were fielded by the nature centre and city staff. When carcasses were available, they were provided to the Alberta agriculture lab in Lethbridge for examination.

All raccoons received for post mortem were first tested for rabies. All were rabies **NEGATIVE**. The carcasses were then given a full examination to look for anomalies and try to determine cause of death. Ultimately, canine distemper virus was identified in these raccoons.

## **What is canine distemper?**

Canine distemper is a relatively common viral infection in unvaccinated domestic dogs. The virus can spillover into wild populations and cause mortality in various species.

Additional information is provided on our wildlife disease fact sheet web pages.

## **What to look for?**

Often carcasses are the first sign of a distemper outbreak. Sometimes, as in the situation in Lethbridge, sick animals are seen first, and carcasses seen later.

## **What to do?**

Anyone who suspects disease in a wild animal can contact any Fish and Wildlife office (office phone numbers are available at [esrd.alberta.ca/about-esrd/contact-esrd/fish-and-wildlife-area-office-contacts](http://esrd.alberta.ca/about-esrd/contact-esrd/fish-and-wildlife-area-office-contacts)). Nature centres or zoos also can be notified - they can then follow up accordingly.