



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Skunk Tests Positive for Rabies in Yellowstone County

Helena, Mont. – On Tuesday, March 16th, the Montana Department of Livestock (MDOL) received confirmation of the first case of terrestrial (non-bat) rabies in the state in 2021. The rabies-infected skunk was captured in Yellowstone County. Two dogs were exposed to the rabid skunk and are being managed for exposure to rabies.

In response to this finding, MDOL has issued a 60-day county-wide quarantine for dogs, cats and ferrets in Yellowstone County that are not currently vaccinated for rabies (MCA Title 81, Chapters 2 and 20). The quarantine is in effect from Tuesday, March 16th, to Saturday, May 15th. Animals past-due for a rabies vaccine booster, animals that are not 28-days past the date of first vaccine administration, and animals that have never been vaccinated are all subject to the quarantine.

Rabies is a fatal viral disease that can spread through the saliva of an infected animal. The virus can infect any mammal, including people. However, it is virtually 100% preventable in domestic animals through the administration of rabies vaccine. The most common animals infected with rabies in Montana are bats, but cases involving terrestrial species do occur. The last documented cases of terrestrial (non-bat) rabies in Yellowstone County was in 2013.

“This case is an important reminder of the presence of rabies in wild animal populations in Montana and the need to keep our pets safe,” says Dr. Anna Forseth with the Department of Livestock. “Rabies vaccination is a low-cost, safe, and effective way to protect our pets and subsequently ourselves from this disease.”

Residents should report any contact between a pet and a wild animal, including skunks and bats, to their veterinarian or the MDOL to ensure potential rabies exposure are assessed for risk and managed accordingly.

The mission of the Montana Department of Livestock is to control and eradicate animal diseases, prevent the transmission of animal diseases to humans, and to protect the livestock industry from theft and predatory animals. For more information on the MDOL, visit www.liv.mt.gov.

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