



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

June 8, 2021

CONTACT:

Dr. Anna Forseth, MT Dept. of Livestock, (406) 444-2939, anna.forseth@mt.gov

Dr. Tahnee Szymanski, MT Dept. of Livestock, (406) 444-5214, tszymanski@mt.gov

Skunk Tests Positive for Rabies in Powder River County

Helena, Mont. – On Thursday, June 3rd, the Montana Department of Livestock (MDOL) received confirmation of a second terrestrial (non-bat) rabies case in the state in 2021. A rabies-infected skunk was captured in Powder River County. One dog was exposed to the rabid skunk and is being managed for exposure to rabies.

In response to the rabies diagnosis, MDOL has issued a 60-day county quarantine for dogs, cats and ferrets in Powder River County that are not currently vaccinated for rabies ([MCA Title 81, Chapters 2 and 20](#)). The quarantine is in effect from Thursday, June 3rd, to Monday, August 2nd. Animals past-due for a rabies booster, animals that are not 28 days past their first rabies vaccine, and animals that have never been vaccinated are subject to the quarantine. The purpose of the quarantine is to reduce the risk of further disease spread in case the rabid skunk had contact with other animals in the county.

Rabies is a fatal viral disease that is 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 the rabies vaccine.

“Rabies vaccines not only protect the health of an individual animal, they also protect the health of animal owners and other animals,” says Dr. Anna Forseth with the Department of Livestock. “Vaccination is a low-cost, safe, and effective tool that we encourage all pet owners to pursue.”

Rabies vaccines are available for dogs, cats, and ferrets, and most livestock species. Livestock owners of animals of substantial financial value or animals that have frequent contact with the public should consider vaccinating their animals. Non-vaccinated animals that are exposed to rabid or suspected rabid animals may be subject to long-term quarantine, an expensive and labor-intensive process.

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 Powder River County was in 2013. Contact between a pet and a wild animal, including skunks and bats, should be reported to a local veterinarian or the MDOL to ensure potential rabies exposures are assessed for risk and managed accordingly.

To protect yourself, your family, and pets against rabies:

- Keep pets currently vaccinated for rabies.
- Keep garbage in tight containers to avoid attracting animals.
- Stay away from domestic animals that act aggressive and wild animals that seem unafraid.
- Avoid night animals, like raccoons, that are active during the day.
- Contact your local animal control agency if you see an animal behaving suspiciously.

If you or someone you know is bitten by an animal, wash the wound immediately with soap and water, consult a doctor right away, and call your local public health department to report the bite.

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.