



Fox Rabies Occurring in Alaska

December 2021:

Wildlife and Public Health Concerns

WILDLIFE CONCERNS

Rabies is endemic (always present) in arctic and red foxes on the North Slope and western coastal areas and reports of foxes displaying typical rabies behavior increases during winter. Last winter was an epidemic year for rabies and fox population control was instituted in Nome. Other wildlife such as wolves and wolverines also can transmit rabies and last year we detected rabies in lynx and river otter as well. At least 1 case of rabies in a red fox has been detected this winter in Northwest.

Feeding foxes or other wildlife increases the risk that people or dogs will be bitten and may be exposed to rabies. Relocating trapped foxes or the carcasses of dead animals can also spread rabies to more areas and animals and thus is not allowed.

Unusual fox/wolf/wolverine behaviors typical of rabies includes any of the following:

- Lack of fear of humans
- Staggering, tremors or uncoordinated movements
- Nipping or biting at themselves or objects, chasing vehicles, hit by vehicle
- Acting seemingly unaware or blind, lethargic or reluctant to move

If a fox or other wild animal has bitten a person, it should be killed IMMEDIATELY without damaging the head and neck. Shoot the fox in the chest if possible rather than the head or trapping it (less risk of a bite plus rabid foxes are unlikely to enter a trap).

- **Contact the Section of Epidemiology (SOE) for assistance in submitting animals to the Alaska State Virology Laboratory (ASVL) for rabies testing. Health care providers can contact SOE for consultation about post-exposure prophylaxis recommendations.**
 - 907-269-8000 8AM-5PM Mon-Fri; 1-800-478-0084 other times.
- Obtain the Rabies submission instructions, forms and shipping labels @ <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Labs/Pages/publications/default.aspx>

If a fox/wolf/wolverine/lynx/river otter is behaving as above toward you but has not bitten anyone, you may kill the animal to protect yourself but these circumstances are reported as a “Defense of Life or Property” take and the carcass surrendered to ADFG. Contact ADFG Wildlife Health and Disease Surveillance Program cell phone 907-328-8354 and email details to dfg.dwc.vet@alaska.gov

- Double bag the carcass (wear gloves or use inverted plastic bag to pick up and surround carcass), in a sturdy box, keep cool until you receive a call back with instructions on shipping or disposal. Obtain ADFG sample submission form @ <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=disease.main> which must be included with the specimen to be shipped in a legal manner.

PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERNs

Exposure to rabies is a public health emergency. If you are bitten by a fox or other wild animal, it is critical that you follow these steps:

- Wash the wound vigorously with soap and water immediately.
- Seek medical attention.
- In most cases, rabies post-exposure prophylaxis is needed if the fox/animal tests positive for rabies **OR** if the fox/animal cannot be located for testing.
- Medical providers can contact the Section of Epidemiology to discuss possible post-exposure prophylaxis treatment.