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Preventing Rabies Exposures: Guidelines for Recreational Camps

Every year, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) receives questions about encounters with wild or stray animals at children's camps. **Because wild animals, particularly raccoons, skunks, foxes, coyotes, woodchucks (groundhogs) and bats, may carry rabies, it is important that camps take precautions to minimize encounters between campers and wild animals.** Rabies is a fatal, viral infection that can be spread to domestic animals or humans through contact with an infected animal's saliva, usually through a bite or scratch.

The following precautions are advised for children's camps:

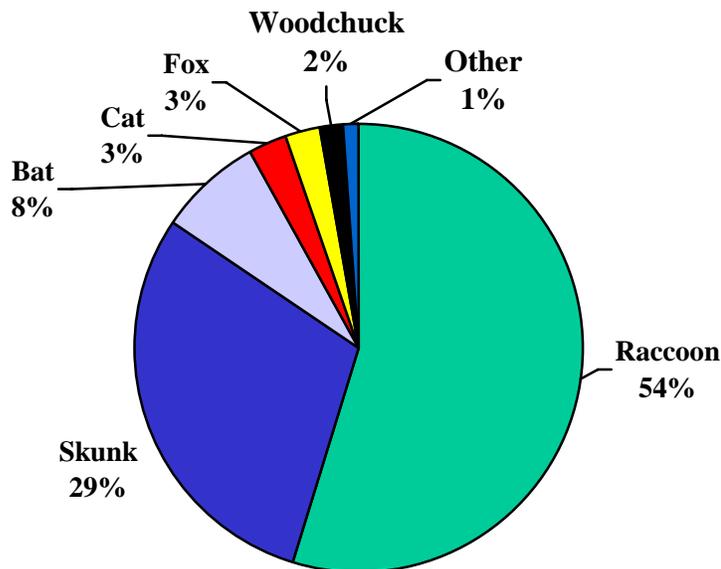
- Camp staff and camp attendees should be informed about the risk of rabies associated with exposure to wild or stray animals. Tell children not to handle unfamiliar animals, wild or domestic, even if they seem friendly; call the police or animal control officer to handle wild animals. Campers should be encouraged to report any contact with wild or stray animals to the camp nurse or other adult in charge.
- Do not attract wild animals to your camp. Keep the property free of stored birdseed or other foods that may attract wild animals. Fasten trash can lids tightly as access to trash will attract animals.
- Buildings should be inspected for bats every spring before camp opens. Attic spaces, rafters, porches, and walls should be inspected for signs of roosting bats, such as bat guano. If evidence of bats is found, camp buildings and cabins, particularly those used as sleeping quarters, should be bat-proofed. For suggestions on bat-proofing, refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) website at: www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/rabies/bats_&_rabies/bats&.htm. If you do not have internet access, you may request a copy of the CDC brochure, "Bats and Rabies" by calling the MDPH, Division of Epidemiology and Immunization at (617) 983-6800 or toll free at 1-888-658-2850.
- Any bat that has exposed a person should be safely captured and submitted for rabies testing. An exposure may be a bite or scratch; however, sometimes a bite or scratch by a bat may be too small to be noticed. Therefore, if a bat is found in a building, and you cannot rule out that a person was exposed (e.g., a sleeping person awakes to find a bat in the room, or an adult witnesses a bat in the room with a previously unattended child, mentally disabled person, or intoxicated person), the bat should be safely captured and submitted for testing. A bat can be captured by covering it with a box or can and then sliding a piece of cardboard under the container to trap the bat inside. Depending on your town and city ordinances, the local animal control officer may be able to offer you assistance in

safely capturing a bat. Information on safely capturing a bat is also available on the CDC website noted above. The local animal control officer and local board of health can assist the camp with information about submitting a bat to the MDPH Rabies Laboratory for rabies testing.

- If known contact occurs between a person and a wild or stray animal, the wound or area of skin contact should be thoroughly washed immediately with soap and water. Call a health care provider and the local board of health; they will help you decide if the person needs to be treated to prevent rabies. Depending on your town and city ordinances, your local animal control officer may be able to offer assistance in capturing the animal. The local animal control officer and local board of health can assist with information about submitting the animal to the MDPH Rabies Laboratory for rabies testing, if appropriate.

The following chart shows the types of animals that tested positive for rabies in Massachusetts between 1992-2006:

**Massachusetts Department of Public Health
Breakdown of Positive Rabies Tests by Animal, 1992-2006**



Children should be taught that all wild animals and strays should be observed from a distance, and that direct contact with any wild or stray animal should be avoided. If questions arise concerning human contact with animals that may carry rabies, call the MDPH's Division of Epidemiology and Immunization at (617) 983-6800 or toll free at 1-888-658-2850. In emergencies, an epidemiologist can be reached after-hours and on weekends through this number. Additional information on rabies is also available on the MDPH website at www.mass.gov/dph/cdc/epii/rabies/rabies.htm.