



STATE OF MICHIGAN

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

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State warns Michigan residents about possible rabies exposure from skunks purchased from Rose's Skunks or Chesterfield Township/New Baltimore location

LANSING, Mich. – The Michigan departments of Health and Human Service, Natural Resources and Agriculture and Rural Development are working with local health departments across the state to alert Michigan residents who purchased skunks in the past six months from Countryside Feather Farm/Rose's Skunks in Attica, Mich., or through a Chesterfield Township/New Baltimore seller connected to Rose's Skunks, that they could be exposed to rabies.

A skunk purchased from this breeder/seller tested positive for rabies Wednesday, Nov. 29. It is unknown how or when the animal was infected. Based on a preliminary investigation by Macomb County Animal Control, it is possible rehabilitated wild skunks were co-mingled with bred and captive skunks at the New Baltimore location.

Michigan residents can possess skunks bred in captivity only [through a permit issued by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.](#)

"In the State of Michigan, it is illegal to take, purchase or possess wild animals without proper permitting from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources," said DNR Law Enforcement Chief Jason Haines. "Where skunks are concerned, it's illegal to take them from the wild for purposes of rehabilitation or to import them from another state or country. We are continuing to investigate this matter, working cooperatively with local authorities and other state agencies."

MDHHS has attempted to reach purchasers based on records from the facilities and DNR permits, however, additional public notification is being conducted as rabies is fatal to humans and animals once they become ill with the disease. As there is insufficient evidence on the effectiveness of rabies vaccine in skunks, individuals who have had the skunk they purchased vaccinated against rabies may still be at risk.

"If you have purchased one of these skunks from these facilities in the last six months, we are urging you to contact your veterinarian to have the animal examined. If you have interacted with a skunk from these facilities, we recommend you contact your health care provider or local health department about possible rabies exposure," said Dr. Natasha Bagdasarian, chief medical executive. "It can take months for rabies to show

up in skunks. If the skunk you purchased is showing signs of illness or has died, please contact your veterinarian and health care provider immediately as you may be at risk for rabies and require treatment.”

According to scientific literature, the incubation period for rabies in skunks can be several months. Rabies is a viral disease of mammals transmitted through the bite, scratch or saliva of an infected animal. Bats and skunks are the most common carriers of rabies in Michigan. The strain of rabies identified in the skunk that tested positive has long been known to occur in southeast Michigan extending into the Thumb. Rabies is fatal to humans and animals. Post exposure treatment is given to people who are exposed to a potentially rabid animal to prevent rabies infection.

Treatment is not necessary if the animal tests negative for rabies. Individuals who purchased skunks from this breeder/seller can also surrender the animal to their local animal control agency to submit to MDHHS for testing.

“Any mammal can be infected with rabies,” said State Veterinarian Nora Wineland, DVM, MS, DACVPM. “MDARD continually urges all pet and livestock owners, including purchasers of these skunks, to work with their veterinarians to ensure their animals are up to date on all required vaccines like rabies to protect them from disease.”

The first symptoms of rabies in animals may include fever, lethargy, vomiting and lack of appetite. Within days, symptoms that are more specific to brain dysfunction appear and may include weakness, difficulty walking, paralysis, seizures, difficulty swallowing/excessive salivation, abnormal behavior and aggression.

The early symptoms of rabies in people may include fever, headache, general weakness and discomfort that may include prickling or an itching sensation at the site of a bite. These symptoms may last for days. Over time, symptoms that are more specific to brain dysfunction appear and may include difficulty sleeping, anxiety, confusion, hallucinations, agitation, partial paralysis, difficulty swallowing, and hydrophobia (fear of water). Once symptoms of rabies occur, the disease is nearly always fatal.

In general, Michiganders can protect their family and pets from rabies by taking these simple steps:

- Avoid contact with wildlife. Do not keep wild animals as pets and do not try to rehabilitate wildlife yourself. Wild animals can carry rabies without looking sick.
- If a wild animal appears sick, please report it to the Department of Natural Resources online at Michigan.gov/eyesinthefield or at 517-336-5030.
- If you are bitten or scratched by an animal, seek immediate medical attention and alert the local health department. A directory of local public health departments is available at Malph.org.

- Protect your pets by getting them vaccinated against rabies. Even cats that live indoors and never go outside need to be vaccinated, as they can encounter a bat that gets inside the home.
- If your animal is bitten or scratched by a wild animal, or if you believe they have had unsupervised contact with wildlife, contact your veterinarian as soon as possible. Even if your pet is currently vaccinated against rabies, additional actions may need to be taken to prevent them from becoming infected. If possible, safely confine or capture the wild animal without touching it and contact your local animal control officer or veterinarian, as the animal may need to be tested for rabies.

More information about rabies and a map of rabies positive animals in Michigan can be found at [Michigan.gov/rabies](https://www.michigan.gov/rabies).

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