



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Contact: Health Communication  
970.400.2385 (office)  
[rfreeman@weldgov.com](mailto:rfreeman@weldgov.com)

### **21 People Exposed to Rabies in Weld County**

**Weld County** – A baby raccoon in South Weld County has tested positive for rabies. A Weld County woman found the raccoon on her property and took it into her home after the raccoon had been abandoned by its mother. Prior to testing, 21 people were exposed to the raccoon making this the largest rabies exposure case in Weld County. Everyone who was exposed has begun receiving rabies post-exposure treatment. “This looks like a year for high rabies exposure in animals,” said Mark E. Wallace, MD, MPH, Executive Director of the Weld County Health Department. “It is very important that people not touch or go near wild animals.”

Any mammal, including humans, is at risk for contracting rabies. The risk of human exposure to rabies increases when pets and domestic animals are not properly vaccinated. If you are in direct contact with a rabid animal, such as a raccoon, your risk is much higher. “We’re not just seeing typical skunk or bat rabies this year,” said Wallace. “We’re concerned about the growing number of cases among other animals such as raccoons and cats.” Pets and other animals can become infected if they are exposed to a rabid animal. This ‘spillover’ of rabies increases the risk that humans will be exposed. To reduce your risk of rabies exposure, keep your pets currently vaccinated and leave wild animals alone. It is illegal in Colorado to possess just about all species of wildlife without proper permits and licenses. You can be ticketed, and the animal taken away.

Rabies is a disease caused by a virus that affects the nervous system. Rabies causes swelling of the brain and spinal cord and is fatal in both humans and animals. It is spread in saliva through the bite of an infected animal. The virus can also be spread in saliva to an open cut, scratch or wound. If a person thinks they have been exposed to rabies, they should contact their medical provider immediately. Vaccination treatment is available to prevent rabies if started before symptoms appear.

To prevent exposure to rabies:

- Leave orphaned animals alone. Baby animals often appear to be orphaned when they are not. The parent animal may not return if people are too close.
- Do not feed, touch or handle wild animals and be cautious of stray dogs and cats
- Have dogs, cats, horses, and livestock vaccinated regularly by a licensed veterinarian

If you do find a wild animal that appears to be sick, injured or orphaned, contact your local Animal Control Officer, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, or a local veterinary office before attempting to move it.

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**Health Administration  
Vital Records**

Tele: 970-304-6410

Fax: 970-304-6412

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