



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **RABIES IDENTIFIED IN SKUNKS IN ANN ARBOR**

#### *Washtenaw County Public Health Urges Vaccination for Pets and Caution with Wildlife*

YPSILANTI, Mich., May 10, 2012 – Four skunks have tested positive for rabies so far in 2012. All of the identified skunks have been within the City of Ann Arbor. There are no known human cases of rabies. The individuals and pets that had contact with the ill skunks have received or are receiving the rabies vaccination or booster. Washtenaw County Public Health recommends all area residents vaccinate their dogs and cats against rabies and avoid contact with wild animals or other potentially unvaccinated animals, such as stray or feral cats.

Rabies is a virus usually transmitted from animal to animal. Humans can become infected through animal bites or other close contact. The rabies vaccine must be given after direct contact with an infected animal to prevent human illness and death. Rabies is fatal if not prevented. Of the four positive skunks identified locally, two were in the 48103 area; one in 48104 and one in 48108.

“We are not alarmed, but we do want to make people aware that this situation exists and advise them avoid contact with ill animals,” says Richard Fleece, Health Officer for Washtenaw County Public Health.

Washtenaw County Public Health is stressing the following actions:

- **Make sure dogs and cats are current on their rabies vaccinations.** Unvaccinated pets that have contact with rabid animals cannot be treated. Vaccinated pets can receive a rabies booster to prevent illness or death.
- **Do not approach or touch wild animals.** Sick animals may display strange behavior, such as approaching people. Use extreme caution with any animal that may not be vaccinated against rabies. Feral cats, for example, may have contact with infected skunks

and carry rabies. *Instruct children to stay away from animals they do not know – even if the animal or animals appear friendly.*

- **Avoid attracting wild animals.** Do not leave pet dishes outside or provide other sources of food, water or shelter to wild animals. This may attract potentially ill animals.
- **Report animal bites to Public Health.** Animal bites should always be reviewed by Public Health to determine if the biting animal may have rabies. Wash the wound with soap and water. Seek medical or veterinary attention if necessary. Washtenaw County Public Health will determine if post-exposure vaccination is needed. Call 734-544-6700.

If you see an animal that seems sick, the Humane Society of Huron Valley (HSHV) may be able to assist. HSHV does not pick up dead animals. Local law enforcement may assist with cases involving dog bites. Otherwise, private companies can be hired to trap or remove sick or dead animals. Fees vary depending on the company and the services provided.

Skunks and bats are among the animals known to carry rabies in this area. Several positive bats are identified most years in Washtenaw County. Prior to 2011, the last rabid skunk identified in the county was in 2005. The number of rabid animals identified each year and a map of general locations are available at <http://publichealth.ewashtenaw.org> – [Animal Bites and Rabies](#).

The symptoms of rabies may take several weeks or months to appear after exposure. Early symptoms include fever, headache, fatigue or general anxiety. Later symptoms include trouble swallowing, paralysis, seizure, coma and eventually death. For more information, see Washtenaw County Public Health's Fact Sheet on Rabies: [http://www.ewashtenaw.org/government/departments/public\\_health/phcontent/cd\\_fact\\_sheets/rabies](http://www.ewashtenaw.org/government/departments/public_health/phcontent/cd_fact_sheets/rabies) or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's web site: <http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/>

Washtenaw County Public Health promotes health and works to prevent disease and injury in our community. Visit us online at <http://publichealth.ewashtenaw.org>.

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