

## ***RABIES TODAY IN ORANGE COUNTY***

*We should expect 2014 to rank among the highest on record for rabies cases in Orange County. Already 12 rabies cases have been confirmed by the North Carolina Public Health Laboratory. In the last five years, by comparison, the rabies cases have not exceeded 12.*

*If this trend continues, there could be upwards of 30 cases in 2014. That would rank with 2002 and 2006 as the only years in which the count has exceeded 25 since the onset of “raccoon rabies” in the latter part of the 1990s.*

*Now is the time for us to prepare ourselves to protect the health of our animal and human companions. Recognizing that rabies is dynamic as well as deadly, we must reinforce and fulfill our responsibilities for what is increasingly called “One Health,” that is, the interdependent health of humans and other animals.*

*Our concern mirrors the very real risks of a disease that is fatal to people and pets alike. Timely medical treatment after an exposure can prevent rabies in humans. However, there is no such treatment for our animal companions. If a dog, cat or ferret is already vaccinated against rabies when exposed to rabies, the animal must be boosted with a rabies vaccine within five days of exposure to remain currently vaccinated. However, if they are not currently vaccinated the only choices are to euthanize them or to confine them for a period typically lasting six months at the owner’s expense.*

*It is imperative that human risks be assessed by qualified public health professionals at the local health department or by a health care provider. Often this means that these professionals work with the pet owner to assess whether any humans have been exposed to rabies through bites, scratches, or through contact with the saliva or nervous tissue of the wildlife. Public health professionals make recommendations about the need for rabies post-exposure prophylaxis, a series of shots preventing rabies that must be received at an Emergency Room.*

*Unfortunately, human fatalities are not just part of our parents and grandparent’s memories. Our last human fatality from rabies in North Carolina occurred in 2011, when a young man in Jones County acquired raccoon variant rabies after being bitten by a*

*raccoon. This case was only the second case of Eastern Raccoon Variant rabies ever reported in the United States. The first occurred in Virginia in 2003.*

*It is critically important in circumstances to be very informed and very responsible pet owners and community members. We should be sure to report all incidences in which we or others are bitten or have contact with a wild animal. We must also be sure to keep our dogs, cats, and ferrets currently vaccinated against rabies and to prevent them from having contact with wildlife through close supervision. These precautions can go a long way towards preventing human exposures to rabid domestic animals as well as to limiting the number of animals that must be quarantined or euthanized.*

**Robert A. Marotto**  
**Animal Services Director,**  
**Orange County Animal Services**

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*Robert A. Marotto is the Director of Orange County Animal Services. Previously, he managed the City of Minneapolis Animal Care and Control Program. He can be reached [bmarotto@orangecountync.gov](mailto:bmarotto@orangecountync.gov)*