

City of Grand Haven



Raccoons with Distemper FAQs

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources has advised that there is an increase in the number of calls for sick raccoons. Many of the raccoons are exhibiting signs consistent with distemper virus. Raccoons are susceptible to both canine and feline distemper.

An annual "die off" of raccoons suffering from canine distemper is normal.

What is canine distemper?

Canine distemper is a highly contagious viral disease affecting animals in the canine families in addition to some other mammals. It affects the respiratory, gastrointestinal and nervous systems. Raccoons are pre-disposed to this disease, as are dogs. It also commonly infects skunks and other animals. The disease is most often fatal and those animals that recover may display permanent neurological damage.

Is canine distemper a threat to humans?

No. Canine distemper is not transmitted to humans and does not pose a threat to human health.

Is canine distemper the same as rabies?

No. Canine distemper is not the same as rabies. People often think a raccoon with canine distemper has rabies. The symptoms can be the same, but the diseases are not. Rabies can be transmitted to humans. A high level of caution must be used when handling raccoons with distemper, as the disease is only confirmed with testing.

How is canine distemper passed between animals?

Infection occurs through aerosol droplet (like a human sneezing and passing influenza to another person), direct contact, or possibly contact with contaminated objects. It is also thought that infection may occur through contact with feces or urine from an infected animal.

Are my pets in danger?

Dogs can be infected with canine distemper and cats with the feline version.

What should I do to protect my pets?

Contact your vet and make sure all vaccinations are up to date. Check your yard for animals and animal feces before letting your pets outside. Keep your dog on a leash during walks.

What are the symptoms of a raccoon with distemper?

- Wandering outside during daylight hours
- Slow movement, may stumble when walking
- No fear of humans
- Appear blind, confused, disoriented
- Mucous discharge around eyes and nose
- Coughing, diarrhea, vomiting, tremors, seizures, chewing fits
- May become aggressive if cornered

What should I do if I see a sick raccoon?

- Do not approach
- Do not feed
- Keep your pets inside
- Call 911 and provide the location

What should I do if I see a dead raccoon in Grand Haven?

Call the Department of Public Works at 847-3493. The carcass will be removed and disposed of.

What will the Department of Public Safety do when a sick raccoon is reported?

An officer will respond and contact a professional animal removal service. The raccoon will be removed and humanely euthanized to end suffering and prevent the spread of disease to other wildlife and pets. If the raccoon is aggressive and presents an immediate danger, the officer will dispatch the animal.

How can I help?

- Make sure your pets are vaccinated
- Don't leave food outside or feed wildlife
- Take down bird feeders that attract raccoons
- Make sure garbage cans are secure and only put garbage out on the day of pick up
- Explain to children that they should not approach raccoons or other wildlife, even if the animal appears docile