

Public Health Advisory

Safe handling and skinning of wild animals

December 21, 2021 Nunavut-wide

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The Department of Health would like to remind Nunavummiut to use caution when handling wild animals that are considered to have high risk of rabies infection.

Rabies is commonly found in foxes and wolves in Nunavut and can spread to humans or other animals when scratched or bitten by a rabid fox or wolf. Humans and animals can also contract rabies from the remains of infected animals.

The significant number of sightings and confirmed cases of rabies in foxes in Nunavut has greatly increased the risk of human exposure to rabies. Due to the danger of infection, we remind all residents to use safe handling and skinning practices to protect against rabies.

It is important to use proper equipment to help protect yourself from exposure when handling a deceased animal with possible rabies infection. This includes:

- Disposable water-proof gloves (double layer latex gloves or cut-resistant gloves recommended);
- Safety glasses, goggles or plastic face shields;
- Disposable face mask and;
- Coveralls and/ or water-proof apron.

Animals that appear to be unwell or are acting strangely may be infected with rabies and should not be skinned.

If you have been bitten or scratched by a fox or a dog, or believe you have been exposed to rabies after skinning or handling an animal, go to the local health centre or hospital and report the incident **immediately**. Treatment must be started quickly after exposure, as rabies infections are almost always fatal. If you see a fox or wolf wandering around the community, or if your dog has had contact with a fox or wolf, call your local Conservation Officer or the <u>Regional Environmental</u> <u>Health Officer</u> for your region.

Hunters or trappers, dog team owners or others commonly in contact with wildlife such as By-Law Officers or Government of Nunavut biologists, may have access to a preexposure rabies vaccine to help prevent infection. The pre-exposure rabies vaccine is available in communities at local health centres or at Iqaluit Public Health located in Iqaluit.

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