

**Animal Health Advisory: Recent Distemper Clusters in LA County**  
**12.14.2020**

Dear Colleagues:

From August through November 2020, local animal control agencies reported an increasing amount of wildlife suspected of having distemper. During that period, these agencies reported 15 raccoons, 1 coyote, and 1 fox with signs compatible with distemper to Veterinary Public Health (VPH). They also reported 10 raccoons that were found dead. These animals have generally been clustered in foothills communities, specifically Duarte and Glendale/La Crescenta/La Cañada.

One raccoon and the fox have been necropsied and confirmed to have distemper. Both were also tested for rabies and found to be negative.

Distemper<<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/vet/distemper.htm>> is a viral infection that can infect dogs, raccoons, skunks, foxes, and large cats such as lions and tigers. The virus does not cause disease in cats or humans. In LA County, raccoons are the local reservoir species for distemper. Dogs can become infected with the distemper virus from direct contact with a sick animal or being near an infected animal when it is coughing or sneezing. The virus can also be transmitted through shared food and water bowls, or other objects that were contaminated by an infected animal. Puppies and unvaccinated dogs are at highest risk of catching distemper.

Common clinical signs of distemper in dogs include discharge from the eyes and/or nose, fever, coughing, lethargy, disorientation, tremors, and seizures. The clinical signs are similar in raccoons and other wildlife. Currently there is no treatment for distemper so preventing the disease in dogs is crucial.

Los Angeles County veterinarians are advised to:

1. Vaccinate dogs for distemper: Puppies should receive a series of 3 or more distemper vaccines between the ages of 2 and 4 months. The vaccine should be boosted a year later, then every three years for life.
2. Protect puppies: Advise dog owners to keep puppies at home and away from unfamiliar dogs, until they have completed the vaccination series. Use caution when socializing dogs or in areas where dogs congregate, such as dog parks, doggy day care, and boarding facilities.
3. Keep dogs away from wildlife: Advise dog owners to never allow their dogs to have contact with wildlife.
4. Keep pet food and water indoors, away from wildlife: Advise dog owners that pet food and water left outdoors attracts wildlife, which can spread distemper to their dog.
5. Report all cases of distemper in Los Angeles County: Canine cases may be reported using the form available at:

<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/vet/docs/Forms/VaccPrevDisReportForm.pdf>

For public health consultations or to report a disease: Call and ask to speak with the Veterinarian-On-Call at 213-288-7060 (M-F 8am-5pm), or email us at [vet@ph.lacounty.gov](mailto:vet@ph.lacounty.gov).

Sincerely,  
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