



## JEFFERSON COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE

Public Health Facility, 531 Meade Street, Watertown, New York 13601

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April 13, 2026

### Two Animals Reported to Have Rabies in Jefferson County

**Watertown, NY** – The Jefferson County Public Health Service (JCPHS) has been notified by the New York State Department of Health Wadsworth laboratory that a skunk from the Town of Watertown and a raccoon from the Town of Cape Vincent have tested positive for rabies. Both specimens were submitted for rabies testing by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wildlife Services. There are no known human or pet exposures to either animal.

These positive cases were identified via enhanced wildlife surveillance by the USDA, rather than through a known human or pet exposure. This collaborative monitoring helps us track the presence of rabies in our area to ensure public safety and awareness.

These are the fourth and fifth animals to test positive for rabies in Jefferson County this year. So far in 2026, one other raccoon, one bobcat and one other skunk have also tested positive for rabies. A map of positive cases by municipality can be found online at: <https://www.jeffersoncountyny.gov/rabies-control>

Rabies is a fatal disease that attacks the brain and spinal cord. It can take several weeks to several months for rabies symptoms to appear. Early treatment after an exposure can prevent rabies in humans and in pets who are up to date on vaccination. Any mammal can get rabies, but it is most often seen in bats, raccoons, skunks, and foxes. Animals do not have to be aggressive or behave erratically to have rabies. Changes in any animal's normal behavior can be early signs of rabies.

Rabies cases have been identified across Jefferson County. Therefore, any unknown animal could have rabies. Avoid contact with unknown animals, including possible stray pets, as they may not have been vaccinated against rabies.

Please take these steps to help prevent the spread of rabies:

1. Teach children to stay away from unfamiliar animals, either wild or domestic, even if they appear friendly. Remind them to tell you if they have any unusual contact with an animal.
2. Do not leave pet food outside as it attracts wildlife to your home.
3. Wash any wound from an animal encounter thoroughly with soap and water and seek medical attention immediately.
4. Be a responsible pet owner by keeping your pet's vaccinations current – even strictly indoor pets. Getting your pet vaccinated by your vet or at a clinic (Petco, Tractor Supply and Pet Supplies Plus offer rabies vaccination clinics) can help stop the spread of rabies from wild animals to humans. JCPHS is hosting a **rabies vaccination clinic this week on Thursday, April 16 5:00-7:00pm at Jefferson County Dog Control**. Visit [www.jcphs.org](http://www.jcphs.org) to view the spring rabies vaccination clinic schedule.
5. Monitor your pet when they are outside. If your pet is involved in an altercation with a wild animal, do not get in between them. Do not touch your pet without gloves as rabies is spread through saliva. Cover your pet with a towel and contact your vet as your pet may need a booster shot.

~End~