

Skunks

As a policy the ECSO Animal Control Unit does not handle skunks. However as of April 2010 Elbert County has more wildlife related skunks rabies cases than any county in the western hemisphere of the US. Therefore special rules and precautions are now in place.

Here are guidelines for handling skunk calls from the S.O. perspective until this rabies epidemic has concluded.

Dispatching Rabid Skunks

A resident is allowed to shoot a skunk on their property as long as they live on 10 acres or more and do so in a safe manner. If the resident is going to shoot the animal advise them to shoot it in the body and avoid the head. If the animal should need to be tested they need the head intact. If the resident lives on less than 10 acres a CFS should be entered and a Deputy dispatched to shoot the animal.

The resident is still responsible for disposing of the animal. Advise to place two plastic bags one inside the other and pick up the animal through the bags while wearing gloves. Fold the bags over the animal without touching it, wrap it up and bury at least 24" deep. Sprinkling coffee grounds or ground coffee in the hole and on the ground around the area where buried can help throw off the coyotes that may want to dig it up.

Rabid Skunk Testing

All skunk testing is done by the Elbert County Health Department. They are currently only testing skunks that have been involved in a bite case. If the skunk bit a human or family pet or livestock the ECHD wants it for testing. Again follow the guidelines for shooting it and leaving the head intact and contact the ECHD for pickup at 303-621-3145 or 303-621-3193.

Skunk FAQ's

Q – Can I get rabies from being sprayed by a skunk?

A – No. Rabies can only be transmitted by saliva of the rabid animal.

Q – Can I get rabies from the skunks blood?

A – No. Rabies can only be transmitted by saliva of the rabid animal.

Q – My dog killed a skunk. Can my dog get rabies from the skunks blood?

A – No. Rabies can only be transmitted by saliva of the rabid animal. However if your dog got any of the skunks saliva in their mouth or on themselves while in attack mode they are vulnerable. In every case of a dog on skunk attack consult your veterinarian ASAP and notify the ECHD at 303-621-3145 or 303-621-3193.

Q – If the skunk has been laying dead for over 48 hours is it still carrying rabies?

A – Highly unlikely. You should still be cautious in handling and disposing of the animal but all active virus should be dead by 48 hours. We advise you to place two plastic bags one inside the other and pick up the animal through the bags. Fold the bags over the animal without touching it, wrap it up and bury at least 24" deep.

Q – If my dog is current on their rabies do I still need to do anything after it has been bitten by a skunk?

A – Yes. Contact you vet and the ECHD to advise them of the bite case and follow their directions. Depending on the case one or more booster shots may be recommended.

Q – What are the signs of rabies in a skunk?

A – The most commons signs appear when the skunk is out in broad daylight. They are nocturnal animals and being in the daylight is highly unusual. That combined with signs of ataxia are generally good indicators.

Ataxia comes in two forms, dumb and furious. With dumb ataxia the animal will appear lethargic, uncoordinated, slow moving, have trouble lifting its head, and appear almost like it were drunk. It will not shy away from animals or humans. It may have excessive saliva running from its mouth. The animal may lie down in the same spot for hours on end and not leave.

With furious ataxia the animal will chase anything that moves. Dogs, cats, cars, people, kids and livestock have all been chased by a skunk with furious ataxia. They will be aggressive and not back down from being hazed at all. These are the most dangerous. Stay as far away from them as possible. Especially keep your pets away from them and call for assistance.

Q – What animals are required to have rabies vaccination in Elbert County?

A – To date only dogs are required to have a rabies vaccination and in addition it must be administered by a licensed veterinarian. Self administered rabies vaccinations are not recognized in Elbert County.

Q – Are there any other animals that a rabies vaccination is recommended for?

A – Domestic cats and horses are highly susceptible to rabies if bitten. Cats, especially feral cats are known to den with skunks and share food sources. They represent the second highest category for rabidity second only to skunks. It is recommended you consult your veterinarian about vaccinations for both cats and horses. Any unvaccinated pet or livestock is at risk.

Q – What do I do if my unvaccinated pet gets bit by a skunk that appears to be rabid?

A – Confine the pet immediately away from all humans and other pets and contact your vet, the ECHD and the Elbert County Communications Center at 303-621-2030. A dog that is unvaccinated and bit by a rabid skunk will require a 180 day quarantine at the expense of the dog owner. The first 3 months must be served in a quarantine facility of the S.O. or Health Departments choice at the dog owner's expense with the final 3 months as home quarantine.

Q – Who picks the dead skunks up?

A – It is the responsibility of the resident to dispose of any dead skunk unless the ECHD has told you they want it for testing.

Q – There is a skunk under my porch (or house or barn etc.). Will the S.O. come get it out or kill it?

A – The S.O. will not remove or dispatch any skunk in such conditions. The animal must be out in the open in an area where it can be dispatched safely.

Q – Am I allowed I trap and remove the skunk?

A – Yes & No. Yes you may trap them but according to state DOW regulations only the DOW is allowed to relocate a skunk and they are not currently relocating any skunks since it would just be spreading the virus. If you trap a skunk you must euthanize it.

Q – Can I hire an animal removal agency to remove the skunks for me?

A – Yes, you are allowed to hire someone to trap and euthanize the skunk(s). The S.O. does not recommend any specific agency. Search online or consult the Yellow Pages.