FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Santa Barbara County Distemper Warning
Vaccinate Your Pet

Santa Barbara County Animal Services is recommending the community to be on high alert after identifying cases of apparent distemper in raccoons in the Santa Barbara area. Sick raccoons have recently been found in the Eastside and Sycamore Canyon and in the area of Arroyo Burro Beach, so the outbreak is thought to be widespread.

Raccoons are susceptible to infection by both canine and feline distemper. Although they both can cause acute illness and death, they are caused by two completely different viruses. Canine Distemper is a highly contagious disease of carnivores caused by a virus and is common when raccoon populations are large. The virus is widespread and mortality in juveniles is higher than in adults. Feline distemper, also called feline panleukopenia, catplague, cat fever, feline agranulocytosis, and feline infectious enteritis, is an acute, highly infectious viral disease.

Canine distemper in raccoons starts slowly, initially appearing as an upper respiratory infection, with a runny nose and watery eyes developing into conjunctivitis (the most visible symptoms). As time wears on, the raccoon can develop pneumonia. The raccoon may be thin and debilitated and have symptoms of diarrhea. In the final stage of the disease, the raccoon may begin to wander aimlessly in a circle, disoriented and unaware of its surroundings, suffer paralysis or exhibit other bizarre behavior as a result of brain damage.

Feline distemper usually begins suddenly with a high fever, followed by depression, vomiting, anorexia, diarrhea, and a profound leukopenia. The course of the disease is short, rarely lasting over one week, but mortality may reach 100% in susceptible animals. Feline distemper virus is shed in all body secretions and excretions of affected animals. Fleas and other insects, especially flies, may play a role in transmission of the disease.

Warning for Pet Owners - Dog and cat owners should make sure their pets have been vaccinated for the disease. Wildlife rehabbers should quarantine any new rehabs until they get a clean bill of health and should have the animals vaccinated against both canine and feline distemper. The cost of prevention is much cheaper than the cost of treatment so make sure your dog or cat is vaccinated today.

If you observe a sick wild animal, do not approach the animal. Contact your local animal control agency or wildlife rehabilitation facility and advise of your observations and the location of the animal.

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