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MATAWA ANIMAL WELLNESS SERVICES MARKS WORLD RABIES DAY WITH HISTORIC MILESTONES—AND A CALL FOR EQUITY

Thunder Bay, ON – On this World Rabies Day, Matawa Animal Wellness Services is celebrating a breakthrough: by the end of 2025, every Matawa First Nation will have had the chance to protect their pets and people from rabies through in-community vaccination clinics and access to a recently launched regional rabies surveillance helpline.

These achievements are a first for Matawa First Nations, many of which are rural or remote fly-in communities without access to regular veterinary care and limited rabies surveillance. But alongside celebration comes a stark reminder of the unequal access to animal health care that puts people in rural and remote communities at risk.

“Every pet vaccinated and every call to the helpline is a step toward closing the gap in animal wellness in Matawa communities,” said Judi Cannon, Indigenous animal wellness specialist with Matawa Animal Wellness Services who works in partnership with animal wellness providers to increase access to veterinary care in Matawa communities. “The sharp rise in confirmed rabies cases across northern Ontario this year underscores the need to protect all communities from rabies, including First Nation communities who are at higher risk.”

Rabies in humans is a rare but often fatal virus that’s spread from the saliva of infected mammals, like bats and foxes. In May 2025, the Ontario Animal Health Network reported [five confirmed cases of rabies in foxes](#) across northern Ontario. Prior to that, the [last confirmed case](#) of rabies in the region was detected in a dog from Kashechewan in 2013. Last year, Ontario had its first human rabies death since 1967 when a child contracted rabies from a bat in northern Ontario.

Rabies is endemic in foxes in northern Ontario, but surveillance in the region is limited. The Matawa Rabies and Diseases Surveillance Helpline, launched in collaboration with the Ontario government, aims to improve rabies surveillance by offering Matawa members a place to ask questions and report suspected rabies cases.

Public health guidelines recommend annual rabies vaccinations for pets, and southern Ontario communities regularly offer low- or no-cost clinics. Matawa Animal Wellness Services has helped administer hundreds of free rabies vaccines, but limited veterinary resources in northern Ontario leave communities at risk. Matawa Animal Wellness Services urges governments, public health agencies, and veterinary partners to ensure Canada’s rabies guidelines are applied equitably.

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For more information, please contact Judi Cannon, Indigenous Animal Wellness Specialist with Matawa’s Animal Wellness Services, at (807) 620-3908.





Matawa Knowledge Sharing Rabies in the North



Rabies is a deadly disease that can affect pets, Peoples, and wildlife.



Making sure dogs and cats get their rabies shot yearly.



Avoiding wild animals such as foxes, wolves, coyotes and bats and report any cases of strange-acting animal to the **Matawa Rabies and Disease Surveillance Help Line at 807-620-3908.**

**Protect pets to protect
Peoples and their
community by:**



For more information on rabies in Ontario please visit:
ontario.ca/rabies



Wearing gloves when handling wild animals and always washing your hands afterwards.



Immediately seeing your family doctor or nurse if you get any animal bites or scratches, and immediately washing any wounds with soap and water for 5 minutes.

**In Matawa member communities - Report animals you suspect to have rabies to the
Matawa Rabies and Disease Surveillance Help Line at 807-620-3908**

