

# Canine Distemper



- Canine distemper is a viral disease of wild and domestic carnivores with a wide range of symptoms. Neurologic signs are indistinguishable from rabies.

## Species Affected in Colorado

- Raccoons
- Coyotes
- Skunks
- Foxes
- Black-footed ferrets (endangered)

## What to Look For

- Abnormal behavior
- Incoordination, seizures
- Weakness, slow-moving
- Crusting around eyes and nose
- Other general signs of illness



Raccoon with distemper showing discharge from eyes.

## Cause and Transmission

Canine distemper is a contagious disease of carnivores, caused by canine distemper virus (CDV). The signs of CDV are not always the same and depend on the species and how long the animal has been infected. Sick animals often have difficulty moving, and can act abnormally due to brain infections. Crusting around the eyes and/or nose is commonly observed, while other signs like coughing, diarrhea, vomiting, and thickened paw pads tend to be less obvious. Sick animals usually do not survive. Spread of the virus is mostly by direct contact with infected animals as the virus does not survive long outside the body. Numerous sick raccoons in a localized region of Colorado are a likely sign of a CDV outbreak. However, because CDV can cause symptoms that are indistinguishable from rabies, CDV cannot be definitely differentiated from rabies without testing of the brain (see CPW rabies fact sheet).

## Public Health Considerations

Because distemper cannot be definitively distinguished from rabies without testing of the brain, sick animals that have contacted people or pets should be tested for rabies. Please report any contact with wild animals to your local department of public health. Canine distemper cannot be transmitted to humans, but may be transmitted to unvaccinated domestic dogs. Please refer to your veterinarian for proper vaccination protocols for your pets.

## Additional Information/References

Canine Distemper, in *Infectious Diseases of Wild Mammals* (Author: Elizabeth S. Williams)

Rev 03/2017