

# Raccoons



## Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*)

Getting rid of raccoons that have made a den in your home is an important step for ensuring health and safety, as well as protecting your property from damage. Raccoons are extremely adaptable creatures, and are common throughout the Greater Toronto Area, living with ease in both rural and urban spaces. Their natural den sites include places like hollow trees and groundhog dens. They are also notorious for nesting in uncapped chimneys, garages, sheds, attics, and under decks and porches.

Raccoons are omnivores. They eat grubs, insects, rodents and other small animals, eggs, fruits, nuts, and vegetables. In human-inhabited areas, they often target garbage and compost bins as an easy source of food. Their dexterous paws allow them to get into many containers one would typically consider safe from animal tampering; they can pry things open, manually manipulate objects, and even turn knobs. If you find your garbage bins frequently opened and knocked over, there is a good chance you have raccoons feeding from them.

If you have a raccoon that has moved into your home, shed, garage, or under your deck or porch, call The Animal Movers at 416-410-6323 or 1-800-322-0019. We will see to the swift and humane removal of the animal, as well as any young, and take measures to reduce the risk of them moving back in.

The raccoon's original habitats are deciduous and mixed forests. Due to their adaptability they have extended this range to include urban and suburban areas, where many homeowners consider them pests.

Mother raccoons find the safest possible location to birth and raise their litter. Baby raccoons are completely vulnerable and need protection. Mother raccoons frequently find and enter attics to shield their young.

## The Danger of Raccoon Feces

Most raccoons carry a parasitic organism called raccoon roundworm (*baylisascaris procyonis*), which lives in the animal's small intestine. The larvae of this parasite can be found in the excrement of an infected animal. As raccoons often contain their feces in one specific area, referred to as a latrine, the infected feces will often be localized. The greatest risk of raccoon roundworm infection in humans and other wildlife comes from ingestion of the infected feces. Putting one's fingers in one's mouth after coming into accidental contact with the feces is enough to transmit the infection; this is more of a concern in the case of young children, who are not as likely to know better. In addition, the larvae are small enough to adhere to dust particles, which means they can become airborne if an area containing dried feces is being swept clean, which could lead to their accidental inhalation or ingestion. Once the raccoon roundworm larvae have been ingested, they migrate to the nervous tissue, most typically the brain or eyes, of the infected person or animal. Symptoms vary from mild neurological difficulties to more severe problems, including paralysis, blindness, coma, and even death. It should, however, be noted that there have been very few reported cases of raccoon roundworm infection in human beings. The best way to avoid accidental infection by raccoon roundworm is to keep an eye out for any raccoon feces deposits on your property, and ensure that any found are cleaned up and disposed of safely. If you have a children's sandbox in your yard, keep a lid on it when it isn't in use. Bring in any children's toys rather than leaving them outside to weather - small children are prone to putting their toys in their mouths, and can be easily infected in this way.

## How to clean up a raccoon latrine.

Cleaning up a raccoon latrine is best left to the professionals, but if you choose to take care of the problem yourself, you should follow these steps carefully.

1. Wear both disposable gloves and an N95 particulate mask.
2. Before you proceed with cleanup, it is imperative that you moisten the raccoon feces, which will prevent it from releasing dust spores into the air and greatly diminish the risk of inhalation.
3. Wrap a shovel in a plastic garbage bag, and make certain that only this bag - and not the shovel itself - comes in contact with the feces. This will prevent residue from clinging to the shovel.
4. Deposit the feces in a doubled set of garbage bags, and dispose of it in the trash.
5. If any of the raccoon feces does come in contact with the shovel, use a blow torch to burn it off. The heat of the torch should destroy any raccoon roundworm eggs that may have been in the fecal residue.
6. Wash your hands thoroughly with hot, soapy water.