



## Alaska Division of Public Health

*Prevention Promotion Protection*

### **2011 Outbreak of Skin Lesions in Seals: Public Health Guidance for Contact with Marine Mammals**

*Updated 11/7/11*

Starting in the summer of 2011, larger than expected numbers of sick or dead seals with skin lesions were discovered in the Arctic. Scientists first reported seeing ringed seals with skin lesions starting in July along the North Slope of Alaska. Similar cases in ringed seals were recently reported in Canada and Russia. Scientists from several different agencies are investigating this outbreak to determine the cause(s) for the lesions and whether or not they pose any risk to humans who come in contact with the seals.

General precautions to decrease the risk of acquiring any illness from wild game should always be followed, and include the following:

- Do not eat any animals that appear sick or diseased, or have washed up on shore;
- If you find a wild animal acting abnormally or showing signs of illness, notify your local wildlife authority;
- Avoid feeding meat from a sick or diseased animal to pets or other animals;
- Wear rubber gloves when butchering or handling animals;
- Thoroughly wash your hands and all of your equipment after working with animals;
- Cooking your game before eating it can reduce the risk of infection from different parasites, viruses, and bacteria that may be present in raw food; and
- If you feel sick, contact your local community health care provider.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Marine Fisheries Service has a hotline for reporting marine mammal strandings in Alaska: 1-877-925-7773.

NOAA is also posting press release updates about the ongoing situation on the Alaska region website: <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/newsreleases/default.htm>.