



PRESS RELEASE

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NIAGARA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH STRESSES RABIES AWARENESS

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The Niagara County Department of Health (NCDOH) Director of Environmental Health, Mr. James Devald is encouraging the public to learn more about rabies and how to protect themselves, their pets and their livestock from becoming infected. Rabies affects the central nervous system causing paralysis and ultimately death in infected animals. Signs of rabies virus infection in animals include changes in behavior such as aggression, agitation and excessive salivation.

Rabies has been present in New York for more than 25 years. The rabies virus can infect any mammal including dogs, cats, ferrets, livestock, wildlife and humans. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the vast majority of rabies cases reported each year occur in wild animals such as raccoons, skunks, bats and foxes. The Niagara County Department of Health has tested over 100 animals for rabies so far this year. Of these, 3 raccoons, 1 bat and 1 stray cat was positive for rabies virus. Environmental Health Director James Devald emphasizes "While the majority of rabies cases involve wild animals, keeping vaccinations current for dogs, cats, and ferrets is crucial to prevention." A pet can act as a link between a rabid wild animal and a person. An unvaccinated animal can acquire the virus through a bite and then bring the virus into the household. "

Title IV of the State health law, section 2141 subpart 1 as adopted into the Niagara County Sanitary Code Chapter 2 states:

- 1. Every dog, cat and domesticated ferret shall be actively immunized against rabies in accordance with regulations promulgated by the commissioner. Every dog, cat and domesticated ferret shall have all initial vaccinations administered no later than four months after birth. Every dog, cat and domesticated ferret shall have a second vaccination within one year of the first. Terms of subsequent vaccine administration and duration of immunity must be in compliance with USDA licenses of vaccines used. The veterinarian immunizing or supervising any person authorized by law to immunize such animal shall provide the owner with a certificate of immunization consistent with the requirements of section one hundred nine of the agriculture and markets law. The veterinarian immunizing or supervising any person authorized by law to immunize such animal shall provide any public health official with the certificate of immunization in any case involving a dog, cat or domesticated ferret which has been or may have been exposed to rabies or in any case of possible exposure of a person or another animal to rabies.*

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Title IV of the State health law section 2140 subpart 6 as adopted into the Niagara County Sanitary Code Chapter 2 states:

6. "Owner" shall mean any person keeping, harboring, or having charge or control of, or permitting any dog, cat or domesticated ferret to remain on or be lodged or fed within such person's house, yard, or premises. This term shall not apply to veterinarians or other facilities temporarily maintaining on their premises dogs, cats or domesticated ferrets owned by others for periods of no more than four months or to the owner or occupant of property inhabited by a feral animal.

Prevention and avoidance are key practices when dealing with wildlife. Raccoons and skunks are attracted to developed areas and capitalize on artificial food sources such as garbage, compost, gardens, bird feed and pet food. Skunks are particularly fond of white lawn grubs and the larvae of Japanese beetles. Wild animals may also take advantage of man-made shelters such as crawl spaces under garden sheds or decks. Opportunistic raccoons frequently den in uncapped chimneys, and bats will infiltrate and reproduce in unsealed attics. By eliminating both artificial food sources and shelter, the chances of encountering bats, raccoons and skunks around your home and yard will be greatly reduced.

To reduce the risk of rabies, follow these prevention tips:

- Vaccinate dogs, cats, ferrets and selected livestock for rabies and keep vaccinations up-to-date. Ask your veterinarian for details or contact the Niagara County Department of Health for their free rabies clinic schedule at 716-439-7444, or www.niagaracounty.com/health
- Keep pets under direct supervision in a yard or on a leash to minimize contact with wild animals.
- Enjoy wildlife such as skunks, bats, raccoons and foxes from a safe distance.
- Do not handle, feed or unintentionally attract wild animals with open garbage cans or pet food.
- Never adopt wild animals or bring them into your home. Do not try to nurse sick or injured animals – call a licensed wildlife rehabilitator, nuisance wildlife control operator, or animal control officer if available in your area for assistance.
- Teach children to never approach unfamiliar dogs, cats or wildlife even if they appear friendly.
- Report animals acting strangely to your local dog or animal control officer.
- If an animal inflicts a bite or scratch, wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water for 15 minutes then call your health care provider and your local health department.
- Use caution with a pet you suspect may have been in a fight with a wild animal. Handle with gloves and contact a veterinarian.
- Contact your local health department immediately if a bat is found near a sleeping person, young child, or anyone with mental incapacitation. Bats have such small teeth that bites are not always detectable. Even unknown or minor contact with bats has led to rabies infection.
- Bat proof your home by repairing screens, vents and other areas where bats may gain access.

Mr. Devald notes, “We encounter, through mandatory animal bite reporting, over 200 pets each year that have not been vaccinated. The owners of these pets are assessed a fines of \$200 for having unvaccinated pets.” He further emphasizes, “We want our community to get this message; there is no cure for rabies. Only prevention can protect you, your animals and your community from rabies. Get your pets vaccinated against rabies. **It is the law.** “

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