

SARATOGA COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH NURSING SERVICE

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RABIES AWARENESS - 2008

Animal rabies continues to be a serious public health problem in New York State. With the coming of warm weather and increased contact between wildlife, people, and their pets, Saratoga County Public Health reminds all Saratoga County residents that we are prepared to help anyone who may have been exposed to rabies or has questions about the disease.

Staff of Saratoga County Public Health can be contacted to respond to rabies questions. Routine inquiries and requests for information can be obtained by calling **584-7460** during normal business hours. After hours, for calls relating to exposures, contact the agency number; and you will be put through to “on call” staff who will assist with the appropriate follow up.

County residents should be aware that significant numbers of household pets, particularly cats, have been diagnosed as rabid in recent years. Of the more than 35,000 New Yorkers who have been treated for exposure to rabies since 1990, many reported contact with a pet that had fought with a rabid animal. Pet owners need to know that New York State law requires all dogs, cats and domesticated ferrets to be vaccinated against rabies. If an unvaccinated pet comes in contact with a rabid or suspected rabid animal, the pet must either be destroyed or strictly quarantined for six months.

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Our mission: To assess, improve and monitor the health status of our community.

It is essential that pet owners make sure their animals are immunized against rabies and their vaccinations are kept up to date. Vaccinated animals can be given booster vaccinations, but these shots must be given within five days of exposure.

For the convenience of local pet owners, the Saratoga County Animal Shelter holds Rabies Vaccination Clinics. There is no charge for the vaccination. Donations will be accepted. Please call the Saratoga County Animal Shelter at **885-4113** for further information on clinic dates and times.

BAT RABIES continues to be of particular concern. In the past decade, two people in New York State have died from bat-associated rabies. In each case, family members recalled a bat in the home; but the possibility of exposure did not occur to them at the time of the incident. Since 1990, 34 of 37 human rabies deaths among people who acquired the disease in the United States were a result of bat rabies. While 97% of all bats tested by the State Health Department are negative for rabies, New Yorkers must remain aware of the risk for rabies from any contact with a bat.

If you find a bat in your home, do not release or discard it. Immediately contact Saratoga County Public Health at 584-7460. Saratoga County Public Health urges all residents to take these common sense steps to avoid exposure to rabies:

- If you are bitten, scratched, or have contact with an animal you believe to be rabid, immediately wash the wound with soap and water, seek medical attention, and report the incident to Saratoga County Public Health.
- To avoid unnecessary rabies treatments, all potentially rabid animals that may have exposed someone should be confined and observed or tested for rabies. Contact Saratoga County Public Health for direction.

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- Although a bite from a rabid animal is the primary way for rabies to be transmitted, contact Saratoga County Public Health to discuss the contact and the potential exposure to be sure.
- Avoid contact with any wild animal. Be suspicious of wild animals that are unusually tame or aggressive toward you or your pets. Do not attract raccoons to your yard by feeding them.
- Avoid contact with any stray animals -- especially cats.
- Do not handle pets with bare hands after any involvement with a suspected rabid wild animal. Pet owners should keep a pair of thick gloves handy for just such situations and should bathe pets after a wildlife encounter whenever possible, using rubber gloves.
- Avoid contact with the saliva of any animal that may be rabid.
- Do not release bats found in homes or cabins – seek advice from Saratoga County Public Health about what to do with the bat. Immediately report any possible contact with bats, including situations where the bat is in a room or camp cabins with sleeping persons, unattended children, or individuals with mental impairment.
- If you are bitten or scratched by a domestic animal always get the name, address and phone number of the animal owner for future follow up.

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