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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: Friday, April 15, 2011
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RABIES AWARENESS

Brewster, NY – Rabies continues to be a serious public health problem in New York State. Rabies is a deadly virus that attacks the nervous system. Rabies virus is in the saliva and nervous tissue of a sick animal.

Rabies is most often seen in wildlife such as raccoons, bats, skunks, and foxes. Cats, dogs and ferrets can also get rabies if they are not vaccinated. You can get rabies if a rabid animal bites you or its saliva or nervous tissue gets into your eyes, nose, mouth or any open wound.

It is also important to avoid handling your pet immediately after it has had contact with a wild animal since you may inadvertently come in contact with the wild animal's saliva which may contain the rabies virus. If you have to handle your pet after it has had contact with the animal, please protect yourself from exposure by wearing rubber gloves. In either case, please call the Health Department to discuss possible preventive action.

- Spring is the time of year when people unnecessarily come in contact with baby wild animals such as raccoons because they believe the mother has abandoned the babies. Baby wild animals may have been exposed to the rabies virus and can pass it on to you if you are bitten or scratched by them.

DO NOT COME IN CONTACT WITH BABY WILD ANIMALS! The mother has most likely not abandoned the babies. There are wildlife rehabilitators who can be called to determine if the baby animals have actually been abandoned and need to be “rescued”.

- Teach children to avoid wild animals, especially raccoons, skunks, bats or any animal that is not their family pet. Residents should fight the urge to pet or handle any wild animal.
- Teach children to tell an adult about any contact they may have had with a wild or unfamiliar animal.
- Never touch a bat. If you see a bat indoors call the Health Department – Don't let the bat get away – it may need to be tested for rabies.
- To preview a video on the proper technique to safely capture a bat found in your home, please visit the New York State Department of Health's website at:
<http://www.health.state.ny.us/diseases/communicable/zoonoses/rabies/>

The Putnam County Department of Health offers free rabies vaccination clinics for dogs, cats and ferrets of Putnam County residents three times a year during the months of March, July and November. If you would like to get your pets vaccinated against rabies, please check the Putnam County website periodically for postings of upcoming clinics at www.putnamcountyny.com.

Report all animal bites and/or contact with wild animals to the Putnam County Health Department at 845-808-1390. After hours or on weekends/holidays report the incident by calling the Environmental Health Hotline at 845-808-1390 and press "3". A Health Department representative will promptly return your call. The Health Department will test any possibly rabid animal after an incident involving contact with a human or pet. For more information on rabies, please call the Putnam County Health Department at 845-808-1390 or visit our website at www.putnamcountyny.com.

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