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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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RABIES AWARENESS FOR SPRING

Brewster, NY – In spring time, people are more likely to come in contact with wild animals and that means potential exposure to rabies, a deadly virus that attacks the nervous system. Rabies continues to be a serious public health problem in New York State and cats appear to be a growing source of concern. According to the NYS Department of Health, last year 43 residents in NYS were bit by rabid bats and 21 by rabid cats. In Putnam County, the number-one cause of exposure is through bats, but cats and other wild animals remain a cause for concern.

Rabies is most often seen in wildlife such as raccoons, bats, skunks and foxes, but cats, dogs and ferrets can also get rabies, if not vaccinated. The rabies virus is in the saliva and nervous tissue of a rabies-infected animal. If a rabid animal bites you, or its saliva or nervous tissue gets into your eyes, nose, mouth or any open wound, you can get rabies.

If your pet has contact with a wild animal, it is also important to avoid handling it immediately afterwards. If you do you may accidentally come in contact with the wild animal's saliva and risk exposure. If you must handle your pet after contact with a wild animal, protect yourself by wearing rubber gloves. In either case, call the local Health Department soon after to discuss the potential need for preventive action.

In springtime baby animals increase. Avoid touching them, even if you are concerned that they have been abandoned. Wildlife rehabilitators can be called to determine if the baby animals have actually been abandoned and need to be "rescued."

Adults can educate children about the risk of rabies by teaching them to:

- Avoid wild animals, especially raccoons, skunks, bats or any animal that is not their family pet. All residents should resist the urge to pet or handle a wild animal.
- 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.

Capturing a bat found in your home is the only way to avoid unnecessary treatment. To preview a video on the proper technique of safely capturing 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/> .

Putnam County residents should report all animal bites and/or contact with wild animals to the Putnam County Department of Health 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." 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.

Three times a year, during the months of March, July, and November, the Putnam County Department of Health offers free rabies vaccination clinics for dogs, cats and ferrets of Putnam County residents. 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.

For more information on rabies, please call the Putnam County Department of Health at 845-808-1390.

The Health Department's mission is to improve and protect the health of Putnam County residents through prevention of illness and injury. For more information, please visit our website at www.putnamcountyny.com; or visit our social media sites on Facebook at www.facebook.com/putnamhealth and Twitter @PutnamHealthNY.