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*Commissioner of Health*



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*Director of Environmental Health*

## **DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**

1 Geneva Road, Brewster, New York 10509

**Phone# (845)-808-1390**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Date: June 2, 2014**

**Contact: Barbara Ilardi, Public Information Officer, 845-808-1390**

### **Rabies Concerns Increase with Warmer Temperatures**

Brewster, NY— With warmer temperatures finally here, people are spending more time outdoors and the potential for contact with wildlife increases. Raccoons, skunks and foxes, as well as feral cats, can carry the rabies virus, which is found in the saliva and nervous tissue of an infected animal. Exchange can occur through an animal bite, or if saliva comes in contact with an open wound, or an individual's eyes, nose or mouth.

Spring is also the time of year when individuals may unnecessarily come into contact with baby wild animals, such as raccoons, believing them to have been abandoned by their mother. Baby wild animals may have been exposed to the rabies virus and can pass it on to you if you are bitten or scratched. Abandonment by the mother is unlikely, and there are wildlife rehabilitators who can be called to determine if the babies need to be "rescued".

To educate children about the risk of rabies, teach them to:

- Avoid wild animals, including new litters of baby animals in spring. (*Everyone* should resist the urge to touch or pet a wild animal or unfamiliar pet.)
- Tell an adult about any contact with a wild animal or unfamiliar pet.
- Never touch a bat. If a bat is found indoors, call the Health Department.

While wildlife and feral cats may account for a significant number of required rabies treatments, the number-one reason for treatments in Putnam County remains bats. As the weather

warms, bats return to the local area and are more active and likely to get into homes. A bat found in the home should be captured since this is the only way to avoid unnecessary treatment, a three week series of shots. A video on how to capture a bat is available on the New York State Department of Health's website at: <http://www.health.state.ny.us/diseases/communicable/zoonoses/rabies/>.

The Feral Cat Task Force, initiated by the Putnam County Department of Health, works to reduce the risk of rabies exposure by decreasing the population of feral cats in our community. This program has captured, neutered, vaccinated and returned 250 cats in Putnam County, since it began in 2012. If you are interested in volunteering or making a donation in support of this program, please contact the Health Department at 845-808-1390 ext. 43160

All animal bites and/or contact with wild animals should be reported promptly to the 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." A Health Department representative will promptly return your call. The Health Department will test any animal for possible rabies after an incident involving human or pet contact. If a family pet encounters a wild animal, avoid immediate handling, or use rubber gloves and call the Health Department.

The Health Department's mission is to improve and protect the health of the county's nearly 100,000 residents through prevention of illness and injury. Core services include community health assessment, disease surveillance and control, environmental health protection, family health promotion and health education. For more information, please visit our website at [www.putnamcountyny.com](http://www.putnamcountyny.com) or on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/putnamhealth](http://www.facebook.com/putnamhealth) and Twitter @PutnamHealthNY.

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