



PUTNAM COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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www.putnamcountyny.gov/health

A PHAB-ACCREDITED HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Rabies Remains a Risk in Putnam

*Putnam County Department of Health reminds residents to
leave wildlife babies alone and vaccinate pets*

BREWSTER, NY— Rabies is most often seen among wild animals such as raccoons, bats, skunks, and foxes. While humans, household pets and livestock are also at risk for this potentially fatal disease, measures can be taken to prevent transmission. Avoiding wild animals, and keeping current with pet and livestock vaccination, are the best ways to offer protection in the event of a bite or scratch from a rabid animal.

While rabies is present year-round the risk of rabies increases in the spring and summer as people spend more time outdoors and bats return to the local area. Well-intentioned people may want to “rescue” young wildlife that appear to be abandoned, when in reality, a mother is usually nearby.

Even if the animal looks healthy, approaching a wild or stray animal is never a good idea. It is unsafe both for the animal and for the person. “Trying to save an animal can actually jeopardize them,” says Health Commissioner Michael J. Nesheiwat, M.D. “Because if a human comes in contact with this wild animal and the health department determines that person’s risk for rabies as high, the animal will need to be euthanized to test its brain tissue” continues Dr. Nesheiwat.

Families should teach children to avoid all wild and stray animals and to tell an adult if they have come into contact with an unfamiliar animal. Rather than approaching a baby animal that seems to have been abandoned, residents are urged to leave the animal alone, or call a wildlife rehabilitator to see if the animal truly needs assistance.

Bats are another big concern. According to the PCDOH, bats remain the number one reason for rabies treatments. “If you find a bat in your home, it is important to capture it safely and contact the health department for an exposure assessment,” urges Dr. Nesheiwat. “Thankfully, post-exposure shots can prevent rabies if given to a person that has

been bitten by an animal with suspected or confirmed rabies,” he adds. To safely capture a bat, watch the popular demo from the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH), available on the Putnam County website at <http://www.putnamcountyny.com/how-to-capture-a-bat/>.

Feral cats also present a serious problem and the Feral Cat Task Force helps to reduce this source which may spread rabies. The Feral Cat Task Force has captured, spayed/neutered, vaccinated and returned 87 cats, and adopted or fostered 25 kittens so far in 2020. For people 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 or contact with wild animals should be reported promptly to the PCDOH at 845-808-1390. After hours or on weekends/holidays report the incident by calling the department’s environmental health hotline at 845-808-1390 and press “3.” A representative will promptly return your call. If a family pet encounters a wild animal, avoid immediate handling of your pet, or use rubber gloves and call the health department. PCDOH personnel will facilitate testing wild animals for possible rabies after an incident involving human or pet contact.

Safeguarding pets and livestock with vaccination is important as it protects them and the people they come in contact with. The Putnam County Department of Health (PCDOH) is currently urging all pet owners to protect their cats, dogs and ferrets by contacting their local veterinarian to keep them up-to-date with their rabies vaccinations. Each year, the PCDOH has traditionally run three free rabies clinics in March, July and November. Unfortunately, due to the novel coronavirus, the March clinic was cancelled and the next one, usually held in July, remains unscheduled at this time. For those looking to stay informed of PCDOH rabies clinics, be sure to follow @PutnamHealthNY on social media or call the PCDOH at 845-808-1390 to be placed on an email list.

The mission of the Putnam County Department of Health, nationally accredited by the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB), is to improve and protect the health of the Putnam County community, composed of nearly 100,000 residents. Core services, provided directly and through collaboration, include community health assessment, disease surveillance and control, emergency preparedness, environmental health protection, family health promotion and health education. For more information, please visit our County website at www.putnamcountyny.com/coronavirus; or visit our social media sites @PutnamHealthNY on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

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