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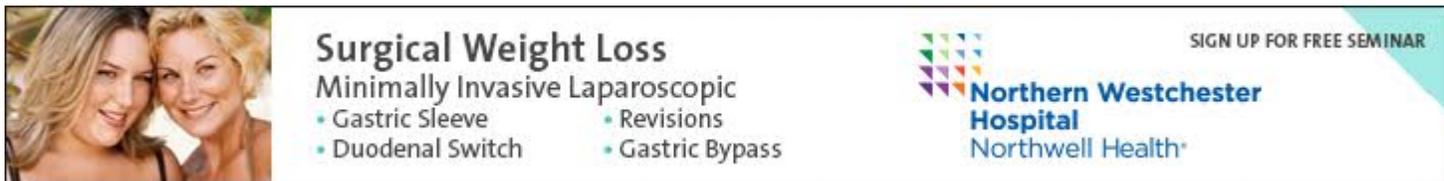


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Spring Brings Increased Risk for Rabies to Putnam

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PUTNAM COUNTY, N.Y. - Rabies is a serious threat to the health of humans and animals and is deadly when left untreated. As the temperature rises, the numbers of rabies cases increase as well. Springtime is when wild baby animals are born and bats often return to the local area.

In New York State, more than half of the rabies cases in wild animals are in raccoons, followed by bats, skunks and foxes. To prevent the spread of rabies, stay away from wild animals, even if they seem friendly. So far in 2018, one skunk and one raccoon in Putnam County have tested positive for rabies. Domesticated animals, such as cats and dogs, can also become sick with rabies. Regular pet vaccinations can protect them.

“A person can become infected with the rabies virus through a bite from a sick animal,” said Dr. Michael J. Nesheiwat, interim county commissioner of health. “Infection occurs when saliva from an infected animal comes in contact with an open wound or bite, or an individual’s eyes, nose or mouth. Remember, an animal does not have to look sick to be infected and the only way to tell if an animal has rabies is to test its brain tissue. That is why it is never a good idea to approach a wild or stray animal, no matter how cute.”

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Every year, well-meaning residents try to help baby animals they think may have been abandoned. Instead, residents are urged to leave the animal alone, or call a wildlife rehabilitator to see whether the animal truly needs assistance. Children should be taught to avoid all wild and stray animals and to tell an adult about any contact with an animal, including an unfamiliar pet.

“While wildlife and feral cats account for a portion of required rabies treatments, the No. 1 reason for treatments in Putnam County remains bats,” Nesheiwat said. “If you find a bat in your home, it is important to capture it safely. We are able to test a captured bat for rabies and if it is not infected, you can avoid the two-week series of shots.”

To safely capture a bat, watch the popular demo from the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) on the Putnam County website at <http://www.putnamcountyny.com/how-to-capture-a-bat/>.

Other programs to reduce the chance of spreading rabies include the PCDOH pet vaccination clinics and the Feral Cat Task Force. Free vaccination clinics are usually held three times a year—in March, July and

November. The next event will be held at Hubbard Lodge in Cold Spring on July 28 from 10 a.m. to noon. The Feral Cat Task Force has captured, neutered, vaccinated and returned 31 cats and adopted or fostered 17 kittens so far in 2018. 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. Trained personnel will test a wild animal for possible rabies after an incident involving human or pet contact.

Article provided by Putnam County Health Department

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