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Robert P. Astorino, Westchester County Executive

NEWS RELEASE

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WESTCHESTER COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT OFFERS RABIES PREVENTION TIPS
Stay Away from Wild Animals, Check Window Screens and Soffits

Westchester County Health Commissioner Sherlita Amler, MD, recommends residents take a few simple precautions now to protect themselves, their families and their pets from rabies this summer.

"Whether your children are at home in their own backyard or roaming through the woods at camp this summer, make sure they know to stay away from wild and stray animals - no matter how cute and cuddly - to avoid possible exposure to rabies and the need for lifesaving treatment," Amler said. "It's also a good idea to be sure your pets' rabies vaccines are up to date because their risk for exposure to other animals increases during warmer weather, too."

Of the 150 animals that were submitted for rabies testing this year through the end of May, 7 were confirmed rabid, including 3 raccoons, a bat, a fox, a skunk and a cat. In 2015, 41 were confirmed rabid, including 16 raccoons, 9 bats, 9 skunks, 6 cats and a fox.

To avoid rabies exposure, it's also important to keep creatures like bats out of your home. In most cases, treatment can be avoided if the bat is caught and tested for rabies. But if the bat is rabid, a series of life-saving vaccines must begin soon. Whenever a bat is found in a room with young child, a pet, a sleeping or mentally impaired person, contact with the bat must be suspected, so call the Westchester County Health Department at (914) 813-5000.

"Check to see whether your soffits and attic vents are tightly screened," Amler said. "If a bat gets inside, capture and contain it safely and call the Health Department immediately. That way, if you, a pet or a family member was exposed, the bat can be tested for rabies, which can help you and your family avoid a series of rabies shots."

Watch this video to learn how to safely capture a bat in your home:
http://health.westchestergov.com/rabies\

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What can you do to keep animals away from and out of your home?

- Always make sure doors and windows are secure and that any small openings that will allow an animal entrance into your home are closed off. This includes screening, chimneys, attic vents, and air conditioners.
- If a bat finds its way into your house, confine or capture it (without further exposing yourself) for possible rabies testing. Never release a bat due to the possibility of pet or human exposure. Instead, call the health department at 914-813-5000 to arrange for testing.
- Cover garbage cans securely to avoid attracting animals.
- Don't leave food for people or pets outside and unattended. Don't scatter birdseed or crumbs on the ground.

How can you tell if an animal is rabid?

- Unusual behavior may be the first sign of rabies in an animal.
- A rabid animal may become either abnormally aggressive or unusually tame.
- Staggering and frothing at the mouth are sometimes noted.

What should you do if bitten or scratched by a wild or stray animal?

- Wash the bite or scratch with warm, soapy water.
- Call your doctor or hospital to find out if additional treatment is needed.
- Report the incident to the health department, 24 hours a day, at (914) 813-5000. If calling after business hours, follow the recorded instructions for reporting public health emergencies.

What should you do if your pet fights with another animal?

- Wear gloves when handling your pet during and after an encounter with another animal.
- Call your veterinarian and the animal control officer in your community to report the incident.
- If your pet is exposed to a suspect rabid animal, try to keep the animal in sight until the police or a wildlife trapper arrive.
- If your pet bites or scratches someone, confine your animal. Call the Westchester County Health Department immediately at 813-5000 and contact the veterinarian for your pet's rabies vaccine records.

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