

RABIES IN OUR OWN BACKYARDS

You may have noticed that rabies has been in the news recently. A pet dog in Twinsburg died of rabies in October after a bite by an infected raccoon. The dog's rabies vaccine was over-due so he was not protected from the deadly virus. There were three dogs exposed to rabid skunks in Lake County. Fortunately, they were all current on their vaccines.

Rabies is a virus that can infect any mammal, including people. It is always fatal in unvaccinated victims. A bite, a scratch, or contact with saliva from a positive animal is considered "exposure". Additionally, almost any kind of contact with a bat is of concern.

What can we do to protect our families?

- Make sure all of your pets are current on their rabies vaccines. Cats are often left unprotected because they are "all indoors". However, they can be exposed by a bat or raccoon that gets into the house through the chimney or hole in the eaves. The cats can escape by accident and may return with a bite wound from an unknown animal. Even horses and livestock can be vaccinated.
- Keep your pets confined to the house or yard and maintain fences to keep out skunks and raccoons as much as possible.
- Be observant of unusual behavior in wild animals you see in the neighborhood. Nocturnal animals like raccoons, skunks, possums, foxes and coyotes are not usually out in the open during the day. They are normally fearful of people as well. Call the police or animal control if you see an animal behaving strangely.
- Teach children to tell you about animals they see and any bites that occur.
- Do not feed stray cats. Leaving food outdoors encourages high risk animals to come in your yard.
- Keep your bird seed and garbage out of reach and secure from wild animals.
- Never handle any wild animal; especially one that appears sick or tame or even a baby. Call animal control or the police. There are trained and licensed people in the area that will care for abandoned baby animals.
- If your pet is injured by or kills a wild animal like a raccoon, skunk, or possum, the body should be saved and refrigerated for rabies testing.

Your veterinarian and the County Health Department are great sources of information if you have further questions.