

Andover Health Division Provides Residents With Safety Tips and Information On Rabies

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Andover Health Division **Provides Residents With** **Safety Tips and Information** **On Rabies**

ANDOVER – With Spring arriving, the Andover Health Division would like to provide residents with safety tips and guidelines regarding rabies and rabid animals, as warmer weather tends to cause an increase in calls to public health

agencies.

Rabies is caused by a virus which is usually spread from animal to animal, but can also spread from an infected animal to a person. Rabies spreads when an infected animal bites another animal or person, or if their saliva gets into a scratch or wound, eyes, nose or mouth of another animal or person. The rabies virus causes acute encephalitis (brain inflammation and swelling) in all warm-blooded hosts and the outcome is almost always fatal.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports more than 90 percent of all animal rabies cases reported each year occur in wild animals. The most common animals that contract rabies include bats, raccoons, foxes, groundhogs and skunks.

It is rare for people in the United States to get rabies. Approximately 55,000 people die from rabies every year around the world, and only one or two of those deaths occur in the United States. However, any possible contact with rabies, including a bite, scratch or exposure to a rabid animal, should be taken seriously. Wounds can be so small that a person may not realize they have been infected.

One of the best ways to protect yourself and your family is to avoid contact with wild animals. Do not feed or handle them, even if they seem friendly. If you see a wild animal acting strangely, report it to animal control immediately.

According to the CDC, the following may be signs or symptoms that an animal may be rabid:

- Lethargy
- Fever
- Vomiting
- Anorexia
- Excessive Salivation (foaming at the mouth)
- Abnormal Behavior

- Aggression
- Ataxia (erratic body movements)
- Weakness or Paralysis
- Seizures
- Difficulty breathing/swallowing
- Self-Mutilation

“Rabies in humans is very uncommon here, but it is important to take the proper safety precautions. Residents should always use extreme caution when dealing with wild animals,” said Andover Director of Public Health Thomas Carbone. “Furthermore, residents that suspect they or their pet may have come into contact with rabies should contact the health department immediately.”

The Andover Health Division also reminds residents to be sure their pets are up-to-date on their vaccinations. Unvaccinated pets pose a significant risk to other animals and people, and may need to be quarantined for a prolonged period, or even euthanized, at the owner’s expense. Dogs and cats that are vaccinated, but have been exposed to animals that are unavailable for rabies testing, may need to receive a booster shot and/or be quarantined.

Residents are also encouraged to check their attic vents to make sure screens are in good condition and fit properly so that bats cannot get in. They should also put up ‘pest guard barriers’ around decks, sheds, and porches, or call a pest company to conduct an evaluation.

Questions about domestic animals that have been exposed to rabid animals should be directed to the Andover Animal Control Officer at 978-475-0411 and questions about human exposures should be directed to the Andover Health Division at 978-623-8640.

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