

RABID RACCOON FOUND IN WEST WINDSOR

While rabies became an established part of New Jersey's wildlife during the 1990's, relatively few cases have been documented in recent years. However, that changed last week when a rabid raccoon was diagnosed in West Windsor.

Rabies is caused by a virus that can affect all warm-blooded animals, including dogs, cats and humans. The disease is spread through direct contact with an infected animal's saliva, traveling along the body's nerve fibers once it has entered the body. Rabies can cause death if not treated immediately. Current therapy consists of a series of six, relatively painless shots usually given in the upper arm.

In addition to bats, wild animals with a high risk of being infected with rabies include raccoons, foxes and skunks. Domestic pets, too, can become infected with rabies - since 1981, the incidence of cat rabies has exceeded that of dogs. Cats are at an increased risk for rabies because of their nocturnal hunting habits which exposes them to potentially infected wildlife.

Robert Hary, Health Officer for the West Windsor-Washington Township-Hightstown Health Departments, offers the following suggestions:

1. Never feed, handle or keep **any** wild animals as pets. Don't try to "save" or take home a baby wild animal, even if it seems abandoned.
2. Protect your pets: have both dogs *and* cats vaccinated. Call your local health departments for their next FREE rabies clinic.
3. Protect your pet from wild or stray animals: observe local animal control regulations - don't let your pet run loose. Report all stray animals to the Animal Control Officer.
4. You cannot always tell if an animal has rabies just by looking at it - most must be tested to be certain. However, beware of: animals that act strangely (walking in circles, stumbling or drooling); nocturnal (nighttime) animals out during the day; and wild

animals that act overly friendly.

5. If a person or pet is bitten by a wild animal, report the incident to the Health Department. Try to catch or isolate the animal as most will need to be tested. If the bite is from a pet, contact the owner and get the animal's vaccination history from their license.
6. All bite wounds should be cleaned **immediately** with soap and water. Contact your physician at once.

Remember - protect your pets, including cats, from rabies: have them vaccinated. For more information, call the West Windsor Health Department at (609) 799-2400.

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