Raccoon Rabies - A Threat to You and Your Pet

Rabies is one of the oldest and deadliest viral diseases and is transmitted through the saliva of an infected animal. It can take anywhere from several weeks to several years for people to show symptoms after getting infected. The early symptoms of rabies can be fever or headache, but quickly progress to nervous system disorders such as confusion, sleepiness or agitation. When left untreated, rabies is almost inevitably fatal, usually within a week after symptoms first appear.

The mid-Atlantic raccoon epizootic strain of rabies first reached our area in 1993 and has since infected other species of animals in all townships in Oneida County. Last year, the Oneida County Health Department investigated 11 cases of humans or domesticated pets coming into contact with a variety of rabid animals including raccoons, foxes, skunks and bats. In every case, the people had to undergo post rabies exposure treatment, involving a series of shots over 28 days, and the unvaccinated pets had to be destroyed. This year has already seen the case of a rabid fox attacking several people and pets in Oneida County before being destroyed.

Pet owners should keep vaccinations for their dogs, cats and ferrets up to date, as prescribed by law, beginning at four months of age. The Oneida County Health Department conducts rabies immunization clinics at various locations throughout the year. Never leave pets unsupervised outdoors to prevent them from coming into contact with wild animals. If your pet is bitten by a wild or stray animal, consult a veterinarian immediately. Avoid contact with any wild or stray animals and teach children never to handle unfamiliar animals, even if they appear friendly. If you find a bat in your home do not allow the bat to escape. The bat should be captured using extreme care to avoid contact with the animal. This is particularly true if you find a bat in your room when you awaken from sleep, or find a bat in the room of an unattended child or mentally impaired person. Once captured, contact the Oneida County Health Department for instructions on what to do. An exposure may have occurred and the bat may need to be tested.

Rabies remains the most significant disease animals can spread to humans, but it is 100 per cent preventable! By acting as responsible pet owners and demonstrating the proper respect for animals in the wild, we can avoid the consequences this dangerous virus poses to us and our pets.

For more information about rabies or rabies immunization clinics call the Oneida County Health Department at 798-5064 or log on to our web site at www.ocgov.net.

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