

ONEIDA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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NEWS RELEASE

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Three Persons Exposed to Rabid Kitten in Rome “Incident Underscores Importance of Avoiding Stray and Feral Animals”

At least three persons, two of them children, were exposed to a kitten that tested positive for rabies and are now undergoing Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP), Dr. Gayle Jones, Oneida County Director of Health said today.

The incident occurred on North George Street in the City of Rome and health officials are concerned that the infected kitten may be one of a litter of several that could pose a health threat to others who come into contact with them. The rabid kitten was taken to the Rome Humane Society, possibly exposing personnel to the deadly virus. County Executive Anthony J. Picente, Jr. authorized a ‘Reverse 9-1-1’ alert be directed to residents living in the vicinity of where the feral kitten was encountered.

“We want residents in that part of Rome to be aware of the situation as a means of guarding against any possible further exposure to rabies. It’s particularly important that children, who might be inclined to touch a kitten they thought to be ill or in distress, be warned against doing so,” Picente said.

Jones stressed the importance of reaching as many people as possible with the message.

“This incident underscores the importance of avoiding contact with all stray and feral animals,” Jones said. She continued, *“there is no way of knowing if a strange animal may be infected, as was the case with this kitten, or has had rabies vaccinations. If contact is made with an animal that’s not known to us, the risk of infection with the virus exists and there would be no way of verifying that the animal is free of disease, should it run away. And the location of this incident, the heart of the city, demonstrates the fact that you need not be in the ‘great outdoors’ to encounter a rabid animal.”*

According to the health department, the kitten was found in a neighborhood where there is a feral cat population that is fed by some residents living in the area.

Jones stressed that feral cats and other stray animals seek food, water and shelter; and if a property owner is providing these in his backyard it will attract an animal population. *Even bird feeders serve to support feral cats because they provide a food source for the felines in the birds they attract,”* Jones said.

“The public needs to understand the inherent danger(s) of nurturing a feral animal population,” Jones said. *“Residents are encouraged to not leave pet foods outside. They should be certain to keep garbage in cans with secure lids and be certain the doors on sheds and other structures on their property that might provide shelter for feral or wild animals be kept closed.”*

Susan Grande, Executive Director of the Humane Society of Rome strongly suggests that at this time all house pets be kept indoors as much as possible and not be left outside unattended. She added, “All adult cats adopted from the Humane Society of Rome have had their rabies vaccination. Kittens, however, cannot receive the rabies vaccine until they reach 3-months and will therefore not be available for adoption for an undetermined period of time. All shelter pets available for adoption are current on all of their vaccinations.”

If someone is bitten, scratched or has contact with the saliva of a feral animal, they should wash with soap and water and contact their health care provider to discuss the possible need for rabies PEP treatment. The health department should be contacted and if possible it should be determined if the animal has been vaccinated for rabies or needs to be tested.

Most importantly, the health department urges residents to have their pets kept current on rabies vaccinations. Under New York State Law, all dogs, cats and ferrets 3-months and older need to be vaccinated. The Oneida County Health Department will hold its next rabies clinic on **Thursday, August 5th, at the Annsville Highway Garage on Rt. 49 from 5:00 to 7:00 pm.** Pets on a leash or in a carrier will be given the vaccine for a 10-dollar donation to help defray the clinic costs.

For more information on rabies treatment and prevention and a complete listing of rabies clinics contact the Oneida County Health Department at 798-5064 or visit our web site at ocgov.net.

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