

## **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 becoming 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 inevitably fatal to both humans and animals, 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. Any mammal can become infected with the rabies virus, but it is most commonly seen in raccoons, skunks, foxes, coyotes, bats, and domestic animals such as cats, dogs, ferrets, and livestock.

Each year, the Oneida County Health Department investigates hundreds of exposure incidences, and each year fewer than one hundred Oneida County residents undergo rabies post-exposure treatment. A large portion of these treatments are preventable. By being aware of the risk and following a few simple guidelines, people and their pets can avoid the threat of rabies.

Pet owners should keep vaccinations for their dogs, cats and ferrets up to date, as prescribed by law, beginning at three months of age. The Oneida County Health Department conducts rabies immunization clinics at various locations throughout the year. [2009 Clinics](#). 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. Wild animals should be left alone, they **do not** make good pets and can carry many diseases and parasites.

If you or someone you know is bitten by an animal, it should be reported to the Oneida County Health Department. Wash the wound immediately with soap and water. If possible, try to locate the owners of domestic animals such as dogs and cats so that the animal may be watched for signs of rabies. This will help avoid unnecessary human rabies treatments. If the animal is wild, call the local police so that the animal can be captured and sent for rabies testing.

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. [Catch the Bat! Video](#). 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 and deadly disease animals can spread to humans, but it is 100 percent 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](http://www.ocgov.net).