

GEORGE LATIMER, Westchester County Executive

Date: June 3, 2022

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HEALTH DEPARTMENT OFFERS TIPS TO HELP RESIDENTS AVOID RABIES

(White Plains, NY) – With warmer weather here, many of us spend more time outdoors, so the Westchester County Health Department wants residents to know how to protect themselves, their families and their pets from potential rabies exposure.

June is Rabies Awareness Month. Rabies is a fatal virus spread from the saliva of an infected animal through a bite or scratch. It can be prevented with a series of vaccines, but is not treatable.

Health Commissioner Sherlita Amler, MD, said: “Keep your distance from wild and stray animals, and teach your children to avoid them, too. If you, your child or your pet are bitten or scratched by someone else’s pet, get the name and address of the owner so that the biting pet’s rabies vaccine records can be verified. That way, the bite victim may be able to avoid a series of rabies shots.”

Should a bat get into your home, capture and contain it and call the Health Department immediately so that the bat can be tested for rabies. To learn how to safely capture a bat in your home: <https://health.westchestergov.com/rabies/rabies-in-bats>.

What can you do to keep animals away from and out of your home?

- Ensure doors and windows are secure. Add strong screens to chimneys and attic vents. Seal any gaps around air conditioners.
- If a bat finds its way into your house, confine or capture it (without further exposing yourself) and call the health department at 914-813-5000 to arrange for testing.
- Keep pet food and water dishes inside.
- Do not leave bird seed and bread crumbs on the ground around your property.

- Do not leave food outdoors unattended.
- Cover garbage cans securely.

How can you tell if an animal is rabid?

- Unusual behavior may be the first sign of rabies in an animal.
- A rabid animal may become either abnormally aggressive or unusually tame.
- Some rabid animals lose their fear of people and become excited and irritable, or appear passive and lethargic.
- Staggering and frothing at the mouth are sometimes noted.

What should you do if bitten or scratched by a wild or stray animal?

- Wash the bite or scratch with warm, soapy water.
- Call your doctor or hospital to find out if additional treatment is needed.
- Report the incident to the health department, 24 hours a day, at (914) 813-5000. If calling after business hours, follow the recorded instructions for reporting public health emergencies.

What should you do if your pet fights with another animal?

- Wear gloves when handling your pet during and after an encounter with another animal.
- Call your veterinarian and the animal control officer in your community to report the incident.
- If your pet is exposed to a suspect rabid animal, try to keep the animal in sight until the police or a wildlife trapper arrives.
- If your pet bites or scratches someone, confine your animal and call the Westchester County Health Department immediately at 813-5000. There are a few simple procedures to follow so that the injured person does not need rabies post-exposure treatment. Be sure to keep your pet’s rabies vaccines current and contact your veterinarian to verify your pet’s rabies vaccine records.

More information about rabies and its prevention can be found on the Health Department’s website at www.westchestergov.com/health. Residents can also like us on Facebook at facebook.com/wchealthdept, follow us on Twitter @wchealthdept or call us at (914) 813-5000.

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About Westchester County

Westchester County, located in the heart of the historic Hudson Valley, covers 500 square miles and has a population of just over a million. Originally home to Native Americans, who were members of the Lenape tribe, it is today a rich mix of many cultures and landscapes. The County is a blend of bustling cities, quaint villages and picturesque towns as well as open spaces and a network of beautiful parks. Westchester is made up of 6 cities, 19 towns and 20 villages. Westchester County is known for top-notch public schools, and a high quality of life. The County is also an intellectual capital, boasting a highly educated workforce, competitive colleges and universities, Fortune 500 companies, world changing non-profits, and cutting-edge research centers. Westchester is led by County Executive George Latimer, who took office in January 2018 as the ninth County Executive. Using inclusion and openness as a foreground, Latimer is fighting to make Westchester a destination for all people to live, work and enjoy. Learn more about Westchester County by visiting www.westchestergov.com

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