

Rabies Prevention

Rabies is a virus which affects mammals, including humans and our pets, and is transmitted through saliva, most commonly from the bite or scratch of an infected animal. Rabies virus infection is fatal in almost all cases, making it one of the world's most deadly diseases, though human infection is rare in the United States.

Annually, staff from the Chemung County Health Department arrange for rabies testing for about 75 wild and domestic animals from the county. Bats are consistently the most commonly tested animal in our area, though foxes, raccoons, skunks and stray or feral cats are often tested for rabies. Most are tested due to them having confirmed or possible contact with humans, and to a lesser extent, with pets. Within the last 2-3 years, several wildlife, a cow, two feral cats, and a few bats from Chemung County have been confirmed to be rabid.

When properly administered prior to symptom onset, post-exposure anti-rabies treatment effectively prevents disease in humans, including in many of our neighbors who were exposed to rabies from the aforementioned animals.

As with any disease, prevention is the best medicine. The following precautions to protect yourself and your family from possible exposure to rabies are recommended by the Chemung County Health Department:

- Keep your pet's rabies vaccines up-to-date. New York State law requires that all dogs, cats and ferrets four months of age or older be vaccinated against this deadly disease.
- Do not feed any wild or stray animals and discourage them from seeking food near your home.
- Keep garbage cans tightly covered and avoid storing any food, including pet food, outside.
- Do not approach or handle any unknown wild or domestic animal, especially if it is acting in an unusual manner. If you find a baby wild animal that appears to be orphaned, do not handle the animal, and contact the Chemung County health Department for a list of licensed wildlife rehabilitators.
- Teach children to never approach any unfamiliar animal, even if the animal appears friendly, and to tell an adult immediately if they are bitten or scratched by any animal.
- Keep bats out of homes and other living spaces by sealing small openings and keeping unscreened doors and windows closed. If a bat is found inside a home or camp, or found outside where people or pets may have had contact with it, do not release the bat. Contact the Chemung County Health Department to determine whether any rabies exposure could have occurred and whether the bat needs to be tested for rabies.
- Wash any animal bites immediately with soap and water and contact your health care provider immediately. Call the Chemung County Health Department to arrange for testing or confinement of the biting animal, and to evaluate your risk of rabies, including whether rabies postexposure treatment is recommended.

IS THERE A BAT IN YOUR HOME?

If you find a bat in your home, it is important that you *capture* the bat because the bat can be tested to possibly avoid the need for painful and expensive rabies shots.

Care should be taken *not to cause too much damage* to the bat in the capture process. If the bat is deemed "untestable" by the laboratory, the bat is presumed to be positive.

If you release a bat that is found in your home and there was a *possible exposure*, you may have to receive rabies shots.



BAT CAPTURE PROCEDURE:

To capture the bat, close windows, room and closet doors, turn on lights if the room is dark and wait for the bat to land. Wearing gloves, cover the bat with a coffee can or similar container. Slide a piece of cardboard under the can, trapping the bat. Tape the cardboard tightly to the can.

Contact the Chemung County Health Department at **737-2019** during normal business hours to determine if rabies examination of the bat is recommended.