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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**POTENTIALLY RABID RACCOON IN LARCHMONT**

The Westchester County Department of Health today issued a Rabies Alert to residents of Larchmont after a potentially rabid raccoon bit a woman yesterday in the vicinity of Larchmont Avenue Church on Forest Park Avenue in Larchmont. The raccoon escaped after the incident. Local police called trappers to search for it, particularly around the nearby Chatsworth Avenue School. Parents of the students at Chatsworth Avenue School, and at the Larchmont Avenue Church preschool, are being asked to question their children about whether they had contact with raccoons in recent days.

"Anyone who believes that they, their children, or their pets may have had contact with a raccoon or have been exposed to the saliva of a raccoon should immediately contact the Westchester County Department of Health at 813-5000 for advice," stated Joshua Lipsman, M.D., M.P.H., Westchester County Commissioner of Health. Dr. Lipsman warns that anyone bitten by a rabid animal or having contact with its saliva may need to receive immediate post-exposure rabies treatment. "When administered early enough, before symptoms develop, the treatment is 100% effective," he said. "However, once symptoms occur, in humans or animals, the disease is fatal," he added.

"A change in an animal's behavior is the first sign of rabies," said Dr. Lipsman. "A rabid animal may become either abnormally aggressive or unusually tame. It may lose fear of people and become excited and irritable, or, conversely appear particularly friendly and affectionate. Staggering and frothing at the mouth are sometimes noted. Children should be encouraged to immediately tell an adult if they have been bitten or scratched by an animal and to refrain from touching unfamiliar animals."

**MORE**

While uncharacteristic behavior is a sign that an animal may have rabies, often there are no noticeable symptoms. This is why it is important to avoid all physical contact with wild or unfamiliar domestic animals. Any mammal can be infected with rabies, but the greatest risk to humans comes from infected bats, raccoons, skunks, foxes and woodchucks. Mice, rabbits and squirrels have never been known to infect humans with rabies in this country.

"It is imperative for pet owners to immunize their animals against rabies and to ensure that these vaccinations are kept up to date," said Dr. Lipsman. "Previously vaccinated domestic animals such as dogs, cats, and ferrets, that have experienced contact with a known or suspect rabid animal require a booster vaccination within five days of exposure. Such incidents must be immediately reported to the Health Department," he continued.

All animal bites or contacts with animals suspected of having rabies must be reported to the Westchester County Department of Health at (914) 813-5000, 24 hours a day. For more information about rabies and its prevention, residents can also call the RABIES HOTLINE at (914) 813-5010 or visit the Health Department's Website at [www.westchestergov.com/health](http://www.westchestergov.com/health).