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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**August 18, 2009**

**FREE RABIES VACCINATIONS FOR DOGS, CATS AND FERRETS**  
**One-day vaccination clinic sponsored by the Westchester County Health Department**

The Westchester County Department of Health, in conjunction with Cortlandt Animal Hospital, is sponsoring a free rabies vaccination clinic for the cats, dogs and ferrets of Westchester residents on **Saturday, August 29.**

The clinic will run from **1 p.m. to 4 p.m.** at **Cortlandt Animal Hospital, 1 Dogwood Road in Cortlandt Manor.** Appointments are necessary. To make an appointment, or for more information, please call the hospital directly at (914) 737-3608.

All county residents are eligible to bring their dogs, cats and ferrets in for rabies vaccinations, which will be free of charge if no examination is given. Cats and ferrets must be brought in carriers and dogs must be on leashes. Aggressive dogs must be muzzled.

“Rabies is an extremely dangerous disease to humans and many animals,” said Westchester County Health Commissioner, Dr Joshua Lipsman. “Vaccination against rabies is essential for the protection of your pet and yourself and is required by law.”

Under New York State law, dogs, cats and ferrets must receive their first rabies vaccination no later than four months after birth. A second rabies shot must be given within one year of the first vaccination with additional booster shots given every one or three years after that, depending on the vaccine used. Owners who fail to get their pets vaccinated and keep the vaccinations up-to-date may be fined up to \$1,000.

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“It is important for a pet owner to know that if his pet is not up-to-date with its rabies vaccinations and it has contact with a rabid or suspect-rabid animal, or if it bites or scratches someone, the pet will either be euthanized or quarantined for up to six months,” said Dr. Lipsman. “A pet that is up-to-date with its vaccinations would only need to get a booster dose of vaccine within five days of the pet’s exposure to a known or suspect rabid animal,” he said.

Rabies is a fatal disease that is spread through the bite or saliva of infected animals. Those animals most commonly infected are raccoons, skunks, bats and foxes. However, domestic animals such as cats and dogs are also at risk because they can easily contract rabies from wild or stray animals.

A change in an animal’s behavior is often the first sign of rabies. A rabid animal may become either abnormally aggressive or unusually tame. It may lose fear of people and become docile or it may become particularly excited and irritable. Staggering and frothing at the mouth are sometimes noted in infected animals. Adults should encourage children to avoid touching unfamiliar animals and to immediately tell an adult if they have been bitten or scratched by an animal. At this time of year, it is also important to remember not to handle baby animals.

All animal bites or contacts with animals suspected of having rabies must be reported to the Westchester County Health Department at (914) 813-5000. Outside of business hours, callers should follow instructions in the recorded message for reporting public health emergencies 24 hours a day.

To learn more about rabies and its prevention, residents can also call the Rabies Hotline at (914) 813-5010 to hear a taped message or visit the Health Department website at [www.westchestergov.com/health](http://www.westchestergov.com/health).