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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**CUTE, CUDDLY, DEADLY - HEALTH DEPARTMENT WARNS
AGAINST RABIES FROM BABY ANIMALS**

Although baby animals, like raccoons or stray kittens, are very cute, residents should fight the urge to pet or handle any wild animal. The Westchester County Department of Health is reminding residents never to touch wild or stray animals, even baby animals, and to make sure that their pets are vaccinated against rabies.

“A special problem arises at this time of year because wildlife are having their young and some residents are bound to come across baby animals,” stated Dr. Joshua Lipsman, Commissioner of Health. “Unfortunately, many people forget the imminent threat of rabies when they encounter baby animals. Even baby animals can have rabies. For their own safety, and to avoid having to sacrifice animals for rabies testing, residents should leave all wildlife and stray animals alone. Parents should be certain to educate their children to avoid handling wild animals and strays,” added Dr. Lipsman.

Rabies is a fatal disease that is spread through the bite or saliva of infected animals. People can become infected with rabies through physical contact with wildlife or unimmunized household pets that harbor the disease. Westchester County law requires that all dogs and cats be vaccinated against rabies and that the vaccinations be kept up to date. New York State law now requires the rabies vaccination of ferrets as well.

The Health Department advises residents not to try to rescue or save baby animals, even if it appears that they have been abandoned. People often see baby animals and assume that they have been orphaned or abandoned when in reality that is not the case. Females must spend time away from their babies to meet the increased energy needs of feeding their young. Chances are their mother is near by, and if not, there are professionals who are much better equipped to deal with these kinds of situations in the proper manner so that the sacrifice of the animal does not become necessary.

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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.

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.