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After hours

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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RABID RACCOON IN SLEEPY HOLLOW

The Westchester County Department of Health today issued a Rabies Alert to residents of the Sleepy Hollow area after a rabid raccoon bit a woman on New Broadway in Sleepy Hollow on Monday, May 12, as she exited her car. The raccoon later attacked a police officer sent to destroy it. The raccoon was submitted to the New York State Department of Health laboratory for testing and was found positive for rabies.

Members of the public are now being cautioned that there could possibly be other rabid raccoons in the area and are reminded to never make physical contact with wild animals, particularly raccoons, skunks and bats.

"Anyone who believes that they, or their pet, may have had contact with a raccoon in the Sleepy Hollow area should immediately contact their physician or the Westchester County Department of Health 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."

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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.