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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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RABID CAT IN NORTH SALEM

The Westchester County Department of Health today issued a Rabies Alert to residents of North Salem who may have had contact with a stray cat in the vicinity of the intersection of Hardscrabble Road and I-684 that tested positive for rabies on June 22, 2003. The American short-haired, orange, tiger cat was taken in by a North Salem family about a month ago. The cat began exhibiting signs of illness on June 22nd and was taken to the veterinarian on the same day and subsequently tested for rabies.

"Anyone who believes that they, or their pet, may have had contact with this cat within the month of June should contact the Westchester County Department of Health immediately at (914) 813-5000 to assess their need for life saving rabies treatment," 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.

"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 this cat require a booster vaccination within five days of exposure. Such incidents must be immediately reported to the health department," he continued. "If residents have questions, they should call us at (914) 813-5000."

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Dr. Lipsman added, “A change in an animal's behavior is the first sign of rabies. 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. Adults should encourage children to immediately tell an adult if they have been bitten by an animal and to refrain from touching unfamiliar animals.”

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.