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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**HEALTH DEPARTMENT INFORMS RESIDENTS ABOUT  
NEW STRICTER STATE LAWS FOR PET RABIES IMMUNIZATIONS**

While making New Year's resolutions for yourself this year, why not make one for your pet as well? Make a promise to get your pet vaccinated on time and keep those vaccinations up to date throughout the year. Not only will you be protecting your favorite furry friend, your resolution will also coincide with recent changes to the New York State rabies control laws.

Rabies shots are now required statewide for all cats, dogs, and domestic ferrets by four months of age. Previously, dogs did not have to be vaccinated until six months of age, cats had to be vaccinated at three months of age, and ferrets were not required to be vaccinated at all. Pet owners who fail to comply with the new law and who do not keep their pets' vaccinations up-to-date can be fined up to \$1000.

"In 2001, New York State was one of the top two states for rabid animals," said Dr. Joshua Lipsman, Westchester County Commissioner of Health. "There were a total of 821 cases of animal rabies statewide, with 94% of those cases occurring in wild animals. Since the former rabies statutes were put into place in the 1940's when dog rabies was the main threat, the state has now amended these statutes to better address today's challenges from rabies in wildlife," he added.

If a pet bites a person, the pet must be observed for ten days to ensure that it is healthy and does not have rabies. The new law requires that if the pet is not up-to-date on its rabies vaccinations, the owner must confine the animal at an appropriate facility such as a veterinary hospital, kennel, or shelter for the ten-day observation period, if the owner is unwilling to have the pet destroyed and tested for rabies. Vaccinated pets that bite someone can still be confined and observed from home in most cases.

**MORE**

For the convenience of Westchester residents, free rabies vaccination vouchers to assist residents in having their pets vaccinated are offered through the Health Department. In addition, staff at the Westchester County Department of Health are available around the clock by calling (914) 813-5000 to help anyone who may have been exposed to rabies or who has questions about the disease.

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, may appear particularly friendly and affectionate. Staggering and frothing at the mouth are sometimes noted. Adults should encourage children to immediately tell an adult if an animal has bitten them 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](http://www.westchestergov.com/health).