



JEFFERSON COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE

Public Health Facility, 531 Meade Street, Watertown, New York 13601

Contact: Rabies Control Program, 315.786.3730

March 1, 2024

Stray Cat Reported to Have Rabies

Watertown, NY – The New York State Department of Health laboratory has reported to the Jefferson County Public Health Service that a cat has tested positive for rabies. The stray cat was found in the City of Watertown with a visible wound. A member of the public took the cat to a veterinarian for medical care, and then brought the cat home with them. Subsequently, the cat began to experience symptoms consist with rabies infection. It was brought back to the veterinarian and passed away. There are three known human exposures, who will undergo preventative rabies treatment. There are no known pet exposures.

Rabies is a fatal disease that attacks the brain and spinal cord. It can take several weeks to several months for rabies symptoms to appear. Early treatment after an exposure can prevent rabies in humans and in pets who are up to date on vaccination. Any mammal can get rabies, but it is most often seen in bats, raccoons, skunks, and foxes. Animals do not have to be aggressive or behave erratically to have rabies. Changes in any animal's normal behavior can be early signs of rabies.

Rabies cases have been identified across Jefferson County, including within the City of Watertown. Therefore, any unknown animal could have rabies. Avoid contact with unknown animals, including possible stray pets, as they may not have been vaccinated against rabies.

Please take these steps to help prevent the spread of rabies:

1. Teach children to stay away from unfamiliar animals, either wild or domestic, even if they appear friendly. Remind them to tell you if they have any unusual contact with an animal.
2. Do not leave pet food outside as it attracts wildlife to your home.
3. Wash any wound from an animal encounter thoroughly with soap and water and seek medical attention immediately.
4. Be a responsible pet owner by keeping your pet's vaccinations current – even strictly indoor pets. Getting your pet vaccinated by your vet or at a clinic (Petco, Tractor Supply and Pet Supplies Plus offer rabies vaccination clinics) can help stop the spread of rabies from wild animals to humans. JCPHS is hosting a **rabies vaccination clinic on Thursday, March 21 5:00 – 7:00pm at Jefferson County Dog Control**. Visit www.jcphs.org for more information.
5. Monitor your pet when they are outside. If your pet is involved in an altercation with a wild animal, do not get in between them. Do not touch your pet without gloves as rabies is spread through saliva. Cover your pet with a towel and contact your vet as your pet may need a booster shot.

~End~