

Health Unit

Media Release

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Rabies Awareness Month

Rabies is an infectious and contagious disease of the central nervous system caused by a virus that is carried in the saliva of infected warm-blooded mammals. **In Leeds, Grenville and Lanark Counties we have two strains of rabies, the raccoon strain and the bat strain.** Both strains of rabies can be transmitted to healthy mammals (including humans) through the bite or scratch of an infected animal. Since the virus is found in the central nervous system of an infected animal the virus may also be transmitted through an open cut, or through mucus membranes such as the eyes, nose and mouth.

Human cases of rabies are preventable. The most effective way of preventing human cases of rabies is to have your pets vaccinated against rabies. **In Leeds, Grenville and Lanark all cats and dogs must be vaccinated against rabies. The Leeds, Grenville & Lanark District Health Unit assisted by local veterinarians will be hosting an annual vaccination clinic. The clinics will be held on Wednesday, May 11 and May 18, 2005 from 2:00 PM to 6:00 PM. The cost this year will be \$15.00 (cash) per animal. For more information please call our Health Action Line at 1-800-660-5853.**

Human cases of rabies can also be avoided by staying away from unknown animals. This includes both wild and domestic animals. If you have been bitten by an animal, you should wash the wound immediately with warm soap and water to remove as much of the saliva as possible. **You should contact your family doctor or visit the local emergency department and report the incident to the Health Unit to discuss appropriate treatment if necessary. It is important to provide a good description of the animal involved in the bite as well as information regarding where the owner lives.**

Bats, as stated earlier in this article, could also carry and transmit the rabies virus. In fact they can be the more dangerous carrier of the disease. The bat's teeth are very tiny and razor sharp, and if bitten by a bat, one may not even know it. **Many times a bat bite may not bleed or even hurt.** People sleeping in the same room where a bat is found, or children who have been alone in a room with a bat should consult with their doctor regarding the risk of rabies transmission. Any live or dead bat that may have had contact with a person should be tested for rabies. If the test results are positive for rabies, the bat cannot be found, or has escaped; one should see a doctor as soon as possible.

Those people working with wild life and animals on a regular basis should consider the Rabies Pre-Exposure Vaccine. This vaccine is recommended for trappers, veterinarians, animal control officers, etc. Contact your family physician for further information.

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