Leeds, Grenville & Lanark District Health Unit MEDIA RELEASE:

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Preventing Animal Bites



It's that time of year when we all want to get outside after a long winter. The Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit would like to remind everyone to enjoy the outdoors, but to remember that along with the increased interaction with our friends and neighbours there is an increased risk of contact with people's pets and with wildlife. While most interactions are positive, it is important to reduce the risk of animal bites or scratches. Animals may bite or scratch while being protective of their owners, new litters of their young or their food. Young children are not always gentle with pets and may be bitten.

The following tips may help prevent an animal bite:

- Stay away from wild, stray or unknown animals
- Never leave small children unattended in the presence of an animal
- Don't disturb an animal that is eating, sleeping or caring for its young or may be feeling unwell
- Never enter a home unannounced or reach through a fence as dogs tend to be protective
- Avoid running and biking past a dog as they like to chase things and people

It is important to enjoy wildlife from a distance. Never feed them! Wild animals may become dependent on humans for food. Leaving food out may attract wildlife to your property which can result in unwanted interactions with your pets, animal bites and risk of exposure to rabies. Rabies is an infectious and contagious disease of the central nervous system and is fatal if left untreated. The rabies virus is carried in the saliva of an infected warm-blooded animal and can infect humans during a bite or scratch. Raccoons, bats, foxes and skunks are significant wildlife species that spread the disease. Biting can sometimes be an early sign of rabies. Anyone who is aware of a biting incident either from a domestic or wild animal must report it to the Health Unit.

The Health Unit follows up all reports of bites/scratches to ensure the person bitten has not been exposed to rabies. A public health inspector will call to ensure you **do not** euthanize (kill) the animal involved. The inspector will ask for proof of current rabies vaccination and may require you to confine and observe your pet for 10 days. This confinement period is not meant to be punishment for your pet; it prevents further exposures and lets you observe your pet for any signs and symptoms of rabies. If the animal is alive and healthy after the observation period, the determination that the animal was not rabid at the time of the bite can be made.

If your pet is involved in a bite, you should:

- Assist the injured person
- Be sure to provide them with your name, phone number and address so a public health inspector can reach you.
- Ensure you return home with your pet under your control and keep it in a secure area away from people and other animals.
- Locate your pet's vaccination record. If your pet is due for a rabies shot, do not book a vet appointment until after the 10 day confinement period when the public health inspector has released the animal. Be a responsible pet owner, vaccinate you pet against rabies (it is the law).
- Keep your pet under your control when out in public spaces and fence your yard.

When we all do our part, animal bites can be prevented.

For more information check our website at www.healthunit.org