

April is Rabies Awareness Month  
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Rabies is a deadly virus which infects all mammals, including humans. It is transmitted by bite wounds, scratches, or contact with an infected animal's saliva. Once it enters the body, it travels along nerves to the spinal cord and eventually to the brain, where it causes multiple clinical symptoms. Signs of rabies can vary from coma to seizures, aggression, dementia, blindness, and drooling. After infecting the brain, the virus travels to the animal's saliva in order to infect its next victim via a bite wound.

In 2007 there were 152 cases of rabies in Massachusetts. Most of the cases were in wild animals (145), specifically skunks, raccoons, bats, and foxes. Only 7 cases were in domestic animals, 1 dog and 6 cats. In the Dunstable area we have quite a lot of wildlife, so it is important to be aware of rabies and take the proper precautions to protect your family and your pets.

- Don't feed your animal outside or leave food out for stray animals.
- Always put your garbage away in covered containers.
- Secure your home from wild and stray animals by capping chimneys and screening vents.
- Teach children not to approach or touch wild, stray, or unknown animals.
- If you see strange or unusual behavior, especially in a skunk, raccoon, bat or fox, call the police.
- Have your pets vaccinated. Any dog or cat over twelve weeks of age can receive a vaccine. In Massachusetts all dogs and cats need to receive two rabies vaccines within 9 to 12 months of each other, then all subsequent vaccines are good for three years.
- If your pet is exposed to a potentially rabid animal, such as getting a wound or abscess from an unknown source, you should wear gloves to clean the wound with warm, soapy water for ten minutes, then bring him/her to your veterinarian for an exam. If your pet is not currently vaccinated your pet will need to be either euthanized or placed under a six month quarantine.

Rabies is a very serious disease. Please take the time to protect your family and your pets. If you need further information, contact your veterinarian or the public health department.