

Things to know about Rabies

Rabies is a very serious disease that affects the brain and spinal cord of mammals (animals with fur/hair), including man. Though rabies is usually a disease of wild animals, it can spread from an infected animal to a person. Transmission of the rabies virus occurs only when the saliva from a rabid animal is infectious and if a person or animal is exposed to that saliva from a bite, scratch, or in their eyes, nose or mouth. Anyone who has had direct contact with saliva from a wild animal, should first wash out the wound with soap and water for ten minutes, then immediately contact their healthcare provider, the local Police Department or Animal Control Officer and Massachusetts Department of Public Health at 617-983-6800 (available 24/7). Animals involved in human or other animal exposure cases should be safely captured by qualified personnel and tested at the State Rabies Laboratory. If you think your pet might have been exposed to a rabid animal, contact your Veterinarian.

State law requires that dogs, cats and ferrets must be regularly vaccinated against rabies. Vaccinations not only protect the pets against the rabies virus, but it also creates a protective buffer between wildlife rabies and humans. Gina Armstrong, Pittsfield Director of Public Health states “Pet owners should make sure that their pets have proper vaccinations and other efforts should be made to prevent rabies from spreading: Do not leave your pets unattended or feed your pets outside. Cap chimney to keep bats from entering and repair holes in attics, cellars and porches. Keep your garbage securely covered and recyclables indoors, and if you encounter a wild animal behaving oddly or aggressively, contact the local Police Department or Animal Control Officer.”

The MA Division of Fisheries & Wildlife (MassWildlife) is also a resource for addressing wildlife near your home. For more information, contact the Western District Office at 413-684-1646 or visit the MassWildlife website at <http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dfg/dfw/> .