

Rabies

Rabies virus causes a disease of mammals which is fatal if left untreated. The virus can be transmitted from one mammal to another by contact with saliva (e.g. a bite wound), brain or spinal cord material.

Rabies is endemic in wildlife in New Hampshire, and as a result every year in New Hampshire there are dozens of interactions between humans and rabies infected wildlife. As well, there are uncounted opportunities for domestic animals (e.g. dogs, cats, livestock) to have unsupervised contact with rabid wildlife.

In an effort to create a buffer between the natural reservoir of rabies virus in wildlife and the human population of the state, it is required by law that all dogs, cats & ferrets over 3 months of age must be vaccinated against rabies. As it is required by statute, this vaccination must be administered by a licensed veterinarian. The statute further requires that the certificate for your pet's rabies vaccination be sent to your town clerk by your veterinarian.

Very effective vaccines exist for the control and prevention of rabies in domestic animals. As well, the state participates in an oral rabies vaccination program for raccoons in the area of New Hampshire that borders Canada. Please ask your veterinarian to address any questions that you may have about vaccination options for your animals.

Even though some vaccines are required by law, every year the state has some domestic animal(s) that are diagnosed with rabies. It is very rare that these animals have ever been vaccinated. There have been several high profile cases of human interactions with rabid animals in New Hampshire's history. For example, last summer a feral cat in Northwood was diagnosed with rabies

In 2008, there were 59 diagnosed cases of rabies in New Hampshire. Three of these cases were domestic animals. It is valuable to remember that even though there is no vaccine required by law for resident animals, livestock are not immune to rabies virus, and in fact there have been rabies positive livestock in New Hampshire in recent years.

Please remember to get your pets vaccinated for rabies in accordance with the statute. For those who own livestock, it is highly recommended that you discuss rabies vaccinations with your vet. Rabies vaccination is an integral part of your pet's health program.

It is also wise to remember that you should avoid direct physical contact with wildlife and should report any wildlife that is exhibiting strange behavior to your local animal control officer.

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