



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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ARMING YOURSELF, AND YOUR PETS AGAINST RABIES: SENATOR RITCHIE'S WEEKLY COLUMN

PATTY RITCHIE December 14, 2015

| ISSUE: **HEALTH, PETS**

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From making sure they are fed properly to ensuring they get sufficient exercise, being a pet owner comes with a long list of responsibilities. One of the most important things a pet owner is charged with is making sure that your animal stays safe—and that includes protecting them from deadly diseases, like rabies.

As we've seen in the news recently, not only do we need to protect our pets against rabies, we need to safeguard ourselves too. Recently, in Jefferson County a woman was bit just outside her City of Watertown home by a skunk that was infected by the disease. This traumatic incident illustrated for all of us that we need to be vigilant against rabies. To stay safe, I recommend following the below tips:

Don't attract unwanted animals: Take extra steps to prevent unwanted animals from wandering onto your property by keeping your garbage closed, and indoors when possible and by feeding your pets inside. It's also a good idea to board up any openings in your basement, attic, porch or garage and don't forget to cap your chimney with screens if possible.

Know the warning signs: While any mammal can get rabies, it's most frequently seen in skunks, foxes, raccoons and bats. If you see these animals—or any others—exhibiting strange behaviors, including foaming at the mouth, acting extremely excited or extremely sluggish, steer clear. If you spot a wild animal on your property, let it wander away, bring children and pets indoors immediately and contact a local wildlife control officer who can remove the animal.

Vaccinate your pet: Vaccines for dogs, cats and ferrets after three months of age are effective for a one-year period. Revaccinations are effective for up to three years and pets that are too young to be vaccinated should be kept indoors.

Don't wait: If you or your pet are bitten, seek medical attention immediately and report the incident to your local public health department.

Talk to children about the danger: As we all know, children can often be attracted to animals that are “cute and cuddly.” Teach your children to stay away from unfamiliar animals both

wild and domestic to prevent any mishaps.

With more than 2,300 cases of rabies reported statewide since 2010—including 146 in Jefferson, Oswego, and St. Lawrence Counties—protecting our communities against this dreaded disease is of key importance. That’s why I’ve made it a priority to advocate for funding to make possible more than two dozen rabies clinics in the region I represent, helping to vaccinate more than 2,000 animals. In addition, I also advocated for funding to expand the area where rabies “bait drops” occur. This unique effort utilizes low-flying planes to drop small packets—which contain a vaccine, surrounded by a mixture of sugar, vegetable fat and other flavors—that are then consumed by animals, namely raccoons.

As a pet owner, I know how important it is to protect our animals against the dangers of rabies. It’s also so important that we too know how to safeguard ourselves, and our loved ones from this deadly disease. For more information on how to reduce your risk, I invite you to click the below links:

[NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH](#)

[CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION](#)