



Health Department: Don't Pick Up Wild Animals



News Release: July 3, 2013

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BARRE – Eleven people and several pets in Barre were recently exposed to the saliva of a baby skunk that appeared abandoned, and was rescued from the side of a road. The animal later tested positive for rabies.

Everyone who was exposed, including six children, underwent a series of vaccinations as a preventative measure, according to Robert Johnson, DVM, the Health Department's public health veterinarian.

The baby skunk was one of two captured in Barre that tested positive for rabies on June 27. A total of 31 animals have tested positive for rabies so far this year in Vermont.

"Wild animals are not kittens or puppies, and we want to remind Vermonters not to feed or touch wild animals," Dr. Johnson said. "The best prevention is to avoid exposure.

"The tendency is to want to rescue the animal, but our advice is leave it alone."

The only way to rescue a wild animal is to make sure it is handled properly (with gloves and placed into a box) and brought to a state wildlife rehabilitator.

For guidance on what to do if you find a wild animal (such as a baby animal that appears to have been abandoned by its mother), contact the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department (802-241-3700), and visit: http://www.vtfishandwildlife.com/wildlife_rehabilitation.cfm for a wildlife rehabilitator in your area.

Once the animals are taken in as pets and improperly handled, and people are either bitten or exposed to saliva, the potential for rabies requires that the animal is tested for the disease. Animal testing for rabies involves killing the animal and testing a sample of its brain tissue.

Without treatment, rabies is a fatal disease for humans and animals.

Avoid any wild animal that is acting strangely and contact the Vermont Rabies Hotline: 1-800-472-2437 (1-800-4-RABIES), Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

For more information visit: <http://healthvermont.gov/prevent/rabies/Rabies.aspx>

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