



Department of Health  
Agency of Human Services



## Bats Most Common Cause of Rabies in Humans

***World Rabies Day is September 28***

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BURLINGTON – The importance of vaccinating pets against rabies was recently illustrated in Vermont when a skunk crawled into an outdoor crate that housed a Newfoundland dog and puppy. The puppy was bitten and had to be euthanized, while the mother, who had received a rabies vaccine and booster shot, was saved.

The skunk crawled under the porch, was later trapped, and will likely test positive for rabies.

“When a house pet is bitten by a wild animal we have to assume they have been exposed to rabies if we’re not able to catch the animal that applied the bite,” said Public Health Veterinarian Robert Johnson, DVM. “At that point we have only two choices, to confine and observe the pet for six months, or have it euthanized. Both options are not pleasant for either the animal or the owners.”

World Rabies Day is Sept. 28, a day to remind pet owners about the dangers of the rabies virus, which is fatal to animals and humans.

Johnson said he has been particularly concerned this year about the number of bats that have flown into homes.

“We’ve had five or six rabid bats this season, and for awhile we were getting calls from people reporting bats in their homes nearly every day,” Johnson said. “Bats are an important part of our ecosystem but they should be appreciated from a safe distance.”

Any bat found in the same room as a sleeping person or an unattended child, or any bat that has had physical contact with a person should be safely collected and tested for rabies. First call the Vermont rabies hotline 1-800-4RABIES (1-800-472-2437vt) or 1-802-223-8697 from out of state for instructions.

The majority of bats (99 percent) are not infected with the rabies virus – and each year approximately 50 to 100 bats are tested for rabies in Vermont.

“Be sure to see your veterinarian every year to be sure your pets, including cats, are currently vaccinated against rabies,” Johnson said.

For more information visit the Health Department’s website at [www.healthvermont.gov](http://www.healthvermont.gov). Follow us on [Twitter](#) and join us on [Facebook](#) for health information and alerts.

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