

Laws for Pet Rabies Immunizations

The Albany County Health Department would like to make Albany County residents aware of the rabies control laws in New York State, and to reiterate the importance of vaccinating domestic animals against the deadly disease.

Rabies remains prevalent in Albany County wildlife. In 2012, Two Hundred Fifty two (252) animals were tested for rabies. Of those tested, nineteen (19) animals tested positive including 7 bats, 6 raccoons, 4 skunks, 1 fox and 1 deer.

County residents are reminded that unvaccinated pets and livestock remain vulnerable year-round to getting rabies from wild animals, and they can then expose people to the disease.

Rabies shots are required for all cats, dogs, and domestic ferrets by four months of age, and owners can be fined up to \$200 if they fail to get their pets vaccinated and keep them up-to-date.

If a pet bites a person, the pet must be observed for ten days to ensure that it is healthy and does not have rabies. The law requires that if the pet is not up-to-date on its rabies vaccinations, the owner must confine the animal at an appropriate facility such as a veterinary hospital, kennel, or shelter for the ten-day observation period, if the owner is unwilling to have the pet destroyed and tested for rabies. Vaccinated pets that bite someone can still be confined and observed from home in most cases.

All dogs in the state must be licensed at four months of age. The license tag attached to the dog's collar can help lost dogs find their homes and ensure the dogs are distinguished from unvaccinated and ownerless dogs. Additionally, the law allows cities and towns to reinstate programs for dog enumeration to document dog ownership, vaccination, and licensing.

In 2012, four hundred ninety six (496) dogs, three hundred fifteen (315) cats and one (1) ferret were vaccinated against rabies in our pet vaccination clinics. These clinics are held four (4) times throughout the year at various locations in the county. Click here to see the 2013 clinic schedule: http://www.albanycounty.com/departments/health/programs_services.asp?id=747

If a rabid or suspect-rabid animal fights with a pet that is not up-to-date on its rabies immunizations, the pet must be promptly destroyed or placed in quarantine for six months to protect other animals and people in case the pet develops rabies. Neither of these is required for a vaccinated pet in the same situation, which requires only a booster dose of vaccine within 5 days.

As always, staff of the Albany County Department of Health are available around the clock to help anyone who may have been exposed to rabies or who has questions about the disease.

Additional information can be obtained by calling (518) 447-4620 during business hours. After normal business hours, residents with urgent inquiries can call (518) 447-4614.