

## The Hard Truth About Rabies

Do you remember watching the movie Old Yeller? I sure do. I grew up thinking that if an animal was rabid they would be violent and foaming at the mouth. I also assumed at that time that rabies was not a problem in Owego, New York, and that only dogs needed vaccination. Boy was I mistaken!

The hard truth about rabies is that it may present as ANY abnormal neurologic state, and may be very subtle at first. It may manifest as a change in attitude, or trouble swallowing, or uncoordinated manner of walking. Regarding our companion animal pets, not only do dogs need to be vaccinated in appropriate intervals, but cats (including indoor ones!) and ferrets as well. *At your pet's young age of 12 weeks it is a requirement by law in New York State.*

Do you know why rabies is such a public health concern? *If a person contracts rabies it is invariably fatal.* Each year 60,000 people around the world die a tortuous death from it. Do you know how easy it is for an animal to come into contact with rabies? A dog can briefly interact with a skunk or raccoon; a cat can play with a bat inside your house. Your pet may even come into contact with a wild animal or feral cat and come home without visible wounds. Cats are three times more likely than dogs to contract rabies, and are also the least likely to show obvious signs of trouble as they can remarkably mask disease.

Please do not be naïve. RABIES IS A REALITY IN TIOGA COUNTY. In recent months, several cases of confirmed rabies have been reported in both wildlife AND domesticated animals. As a pet owner, you are responsible to your pets, your family, yourself, and your neighbors for keeping your dog and/or cat up to date with rabies vaccination. It is such an important vaccine that the Public Health Department even holds rabies vaccination clinics at no charge to you (although \$5 donation is suggested). There is no excuse to neglect it. Ask anyone who has had to have their beloved pet euthanized due to possible exposure to a rabid animal, all because they were not up to date on a simple vaccine. Also keep in mind that post-exposure treatment for yourself is no walk in the park.

If your animal is not up to date on rabies vaccination, please contact your veterinarian or the Health Department (Tioga County Division: 687-8565). If your pet has played with a bat or come into contact with a wild critter, call your veterinarian. Even if your pet is up to date on their vaccine, a Booster vaccine is immediately necessary for protection.

Next article's topic: Feline Retroviruses (Feline Leukemia and Feline Aids)