



# County of Erie

CHRIS COLLINS  
COUNTY EXECUTIVE

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

ANTHONY J. BILLITTIER IV, M.D., FACEP  
COMMISSIONER OF HEALTH

## HEALTH ADVISORY #245

JUNE 15, 2009

### HEALTH ADVISORY: MANDATORY ANIMAL BITE NOTIFICATION

*Please distribute immediately to Community providers, staff in the Departments of Laboratory Medicine, Critical Care, Emergency Medicine, Family Practice, Internal Medicine, Infectious Disease, Infection Control, Pediatrics, Pulmonary Medicine, and all inpatient and outpatient units.*

The purpose of this advisory is to inform providers of the Erie County Department of Health (ECDOH) Rabies Control Policy; to reinforce the NYS Sanitary Code requirement that all health care providers immediately report incidents of animal bites, scratches, exposure to saliva, or bat exposure to the ECDOH; and to provide all contact information for reporting.

Since February 2009, 16 cases of animal rabies have been confirmed in Erie County. Although the majority of cases have been in raccoons (12), cases have been identified in other species as well, including bats (2), skunk (1), and fox (1). In 2007, a total of 40 cases were confirmed in Erie County; and, in 2008, 26 cases were identified. There have been no recent cases of human rabies infections.

#### **ECDOH Rabies Control Policy**

The ECDOH Rabies Control Policy is available at <http://www.erie.gov/health/rabies.asp>. The following elements are relevant to health care providers:

- The purpose of the ECDOH Rabies Control Policy is to prevent any human death due to rabies. Rabies may be fatal to humans only if post-exposure vaccination is not administered; administered incorrectly (e.g., RIG not injected around a bite); or administered too late.
- **A bite from any warm-blooded animal is considered to be a possible exposure to the rabies virus and warrants further investigation.** In addition, exposure may result from other non-bite mechanisms (e.g., saliva contact with an open wound). Further, a bat discovered upon awakening in the sleeping quarters or found in the sleeping quarters of an individual incapable of communicating (e.g., infant, intoxicated individual) should be considered to be a possible exposure. Thereby, it is mandated by New York State Public Health Law that **every animal bite or other exposure be reported to the ECDOH.** Reporting must occur for both wild AND domestic animals including family pets.

- The Commissioner of Health will recommend and facilitate rabies post-exposure vaccination when indicated for anyone bitten, scratched, or otherwise exposed to saliva or other infectious materials (e.g., central nervous system tissue) from certain animals that are not identified or captured, as well as from animals that are found to be infected with rabies.
- Ideally, the animal MUST be identified if it is an owned pet, or captured if it is a stray cat, dog, or wild animal including a bat in the sleeping quarters. Upon notification, the ECDOH will work the pet's owner and veterinarian to determine and verify vaccination history or arrange for appropriate confinement and observation. In the case of stray or wild animals, ECDOH will work with law enforcement and animal control to locate and capture the animal for rabies testing.

### **Reporting Requirements**

The NY State Sanitary Code requires that health care providers report all cases of animal bites to the local health department. All incidents of animal bites, scratches, or saliva exposure MUST be considered a suspect rabies exposure. The following sections of NYS10, 2.14 refer to this directive:

*(b) It shall be the duty of every health care provider to report immediately to the local health authority having jurisdiction the full name, age, address and telephone number of any person under his care or observation who has been exposed to any animal suspected by the health care provider of having rabies and all pertinent facts relating to such exposure. Such notification shall occur prior to starting rabies postexposure prophylaxis, except in those cases where prior notification would compromise the health of the patient.*

*(d) It shall be the duty of every health care provider who has cause to believe that contact has occurred with a rabid animal or animal suspected of being rabid by the health care provider which requires rabies prophylaxis subsequent to the exposure to report the initiation of such prophylaxis and all pertinent facts relating to any such bite, exposure or treatment to the local health authority.*

### **Postexposure Prophylaxis**

Upon notification, the ECDOH will work with the exposed individual(s), health care provider, animal owner, veterinarian, animal control officer, etc. to determine whether post-exposure prophylaxis is indicated. All post-exposure prophylaxis must be authorized by the ECDOH in advance, and administered at the Erie County Medical Center Emergency Department.

### **ECDOH Notification**

Please notify the ECDOH Rabies Prevention Program to report all animal bites, scratches, contact with nervous system or saliva, as well as bat encounters as follows:

Monday to Friday (8:30 AM – 4:30 PM) - **(716) 961-6800**

Evenings, weekends, and holidays – **(716) 961-7898**

If you have any questions regarding this advisory or rabies in general, please contact Peter J. Tripi at (716) 961-7524.

### **Health Category Definitions:**

**Health Alert FLASH:** conveys the highest level of importance due to a large-scale, catastrophic public health emergency; warrants immediate action or attention

**Health Alert Priority:** conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention to a health problem or situation

**Health Advisory:** provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action

**Health Update:** provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; no immediate action necessary