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MONTAGUE BOARD OF HEALTH

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PRESS RELEASE

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The Montague Board of Health is advising individuals who live in and around the village of Millers Falls, Montague, to be aware that there has been a confirmed case of rabies in a fox in that area of town. Animals travel widely and this message is a reminder for everyone that rabies is in Franklin County.

It is always important to avoid contact with wild animals whether they are dead or alive. The behavior of rabid animals is unpredictable and it is not uncommon for affected animals to attack people, other animals or even inanimate objects. If you see a wild animal acting strange keep your distance, go indoors or into your car. When it is safe to get to a phone call the police department and they will dispatch the animal control officer.

There are several precautions everyone can take to avoid any possible exposures to rabies.

1. Vaccinate your pets. The cases that usually represent the highest numbers of human exposures involve rabid domestic animals. The most common domestic animal to contract rabies is the cat. None of the cats that tested positive for rabies in Massachusetts had a current vaccination. Ask your veterinarian to be sure that your animal has a current rabies vaccination.

2. Do not let your pets roam free. Humans are frequently exposed to rabies through handling a pet that has fought with a rabid animal. It is natural to want to console your animal after it has been in a fight. However, if any saliva from the rabid animal is left on your pet's fur, there is a definite risk of exposure.

3. Avoid any contact with wild animals, alive or dead. The behavior of rabid animals is unpredictable. Approaching a sick animal, no matter what condition it appears to be in, is

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dangerous. The rabies virus can be active after the host animal dies, but it can only be transmitted if there is direct contact. If you must handle wildlife, wear gloves.

What should I do if I see a sick animal?

Call the local police; they will either come themselves or notify the correct official. Do not attempt to contain the animal yourself. It is not uncommon for a rabid animal to attack anything: people, animals, inanimate objects, etc. Remember, avoid all contact.

How do I know if my pet is currently vaccinated?

In order to have a valid 3-year shot, the dog or cat must have a primary series of vaccinations; 2 shots, 9-12 months apart from each other. The first shot in an animal's life will normally be given at about 3 months of age. This shot is said to be effective for one year. The animal must then go back for its second shot no sooner than 9 and no later than 12 months from the date the first shot was given. If the second shot is given in that 3-month window, it will be considered effective for 3 years. Any shot given after that will also be considered effective for 3 years. Regardless of age, unless the animal has the primary series done correctly, rabies vaccinations are only considered to be effective for 1 year.

If you have questions call Gina McNeely at the Montague Board of Health (413) 863-3200 ext. 205

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