

**NJLINCS Health Alert Network**  
**Public Health Advisory**

*Distributed by the New Jersey Department of Health*

Subject: More Than a Dozen People in 3 NJ Counties May Have Been Exposed to Rabid Kitten

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Attachments: None

The NJDOH reminds residents to protect themselves and their pets.

More than a dozen people in three New Jersey counties may have been exposed to a kitten who tested positive for rabies at the New Jersey Department of Health lab on Nov. 28.

Any individuals or animals that may have been in contact with this kitten between Nov. 13 and Nov. 23 should contact their local health department and consult a medical or veterinary health care provider to determine if rabies exposures occurred.

On Nov. 12, a stray kitten was found and adopted in Edison, and the owner received rabies post-exposure prophylaxis beginning on Nov. 28 due to exposure to the kitten's saliva. The owner brought the kitten to classes at Branford Hall Career Institute in Hamilton Township, Mercer County from Nov. 13 through Nov. 16 when it is believed two classmates were exposed.

The owner also brought the kitten to work at a Middlesex County hospital on either Nov. 13 or 14 so it could be looked after while the owner was at work. The owner told officials she kept the kitten inside an animal carrier while indoors and does not believe anyone was exposed to the kitten at that time.

The kitten was taken to a Monmouth County veterinary facility for a wellness check on Nov. 16. At that time, the animal was not displaying signs of rabies. The next day, the kitten was taken to a Thanksgiving party in Old Bridge where about a dozen people had close contact with the kitten. Some guests reported being scratched or licked by the kitten.

The kitten began exhibiting signs of rabies infection on Nov. 23 when it stopped eating and became fatigued. It developed weakness in its hind limbs the next day. The kitten was brought to a Monmouth County veterinary facility on Nov. 25 and was euthanized on Nov. 26.

"Cats have accounted for 85 percent of the domestic animal cases in New Jersey since 1989 because many roam free and are generally not vaccinated against rabies," State

Public Health Veterinarian Dr. Colin Campbell said. "Over the past five years, there have been about 20 cats infected with rabies annually."

The local health departments involved are investigating to determine the total number of individuals and animals who were possibly exposed to the kitten.

"Human rabies cases are rare in the United States and treatment is 100 percent effective if given promptly," Campbell said. "Treatment is a dose of rabies immune globulin and a series of rabies vaccinations over 14 days. People exposed to the rabies virus should be treated promptly to prevent infection. If untreated, rabies infections can be fatal."

Individuals interested in adopting cats and dogs should visit a licensed animal shelter or pound. These facilities usually have a wide variety of animals available for adoption.

A chart of New Jersey animal rabies cases by county and species is available here.

Anyone who sees a suspected rabid animal should avoid contact and call animal control or the local police immediately for assistance, once they are safe from attack. If your pet is bitten by a potentially rabid animal, call your veterinarian immediately and report the bite to your local health department. A directory of local health departments is available on-line: <http://www.state.nj.us/health/lh/community/index.shtml#1>.

In addition to vaccinating pets for rabies, there are several things residents can do to protect themselves and their pets:

- . Avoid unknown wildlife and animals
- . Keep pets on leashes. Do not allow them to roam and possibly encounter rabid wildlife
- . Never feed or touch wild or stray animals, especially stray cats, bats, skunks, raccoons, foxes or groundhogs
- . Teach children that they should tell an adult if they were bitten or scratched by an animal
- . Call a doctor and the local health department if bitten or exposed to saliva or blood of a wild or stray animal
- . Contact a veterinarian if your pet was exposed to a bat, raccoon, skunk or other wild animal.
- . If you or your pet is bitten by an animal, wash the wound immediately with soap and water and seek medical attention.

Rabies is a deadly disease caused by a virus found in the saliva of a rabid animal and is transmitted by a bite, scratch or contact with infected saliva via exposure to an open cut or wound. Initial symptoms can include fever, pain at the site of the bite, lethargy, lack of appetite, nausea and vomiting. Symptoms can develop anywhere from 12 days to six months after a bite. Left untreated, rabies attacks the nervous system and causes death.

Rabid animals are usually vicious and aggressive or may appear disoriented or impaired. Some animals may be rabid even though they appear to be normal.

People should stay away from all wild and stray animals that are aggressive or appear to be sick.

Rabies occurs most often in wildlife, particularly among raccoons, bats, skunks and groundhogs. These animals represent 95 percent of rabies cases in the United States.

Dogs and cats receiving an initial rabies vaccination are not considered immunized until 28 days after the vaccine has been administered. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that any dog or cat newly vaccinated or those too young to receive the vaccine (less than three months) not be left outdoors unattended.

A rabies Frequently Asked Questions webpage is available on the NJDOH website:  
<http://www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/rabies.shtml>