‘Rabies Kills’: Raising Awareness of Serious Problem in PA

More than 1,000 rabies cases confirmed in PA in last five years

BY MARK HILLER

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DALLAS, LUZERNE COUNTY (WBRE/WYOU) -- A local organization is trying to raise awareness about a possible serious health risk in your neighborhood. The danger could be coming from the woods right to your doorstep.

That danger is rabies. Hundreds of cases are documented each year in Pennsylvania- including some that happen right in our backyard.

It's that day in May 2016 that Francis Smith of Harwood will never forget. He ended up in an ambulance after a rabid fox attacked him. "When I finally broke loose I ran in the garage and I actually cried. This is no lie. That's how scared I was."

Wyoming County Humane Officer Lisa Devlin said on Thursday, "Over the last five years we've had a thousand reported cases of rabies across Pennsylvania. That's a big concern." Ofc. Devlin, who works with the Tunkhannock-based no-kill shelter 'Think Of Me Animal Rescue', worries for the rescue's volunteers who try to trap feral cats with food. That food is also luring last year's number one rabies carrier. "They're attracting raccoons. They're eating with the cats and that's how our trappers can be at risk."

That risk, she says, can also be real for your family. "They have children that want to be around these small animals and pick up the cat, the stray cat that might be sick and you know they don't tell their parent they were scratched or bitten."

It's not just the bite or scratch from a rabid animal that can threaten your health. Just being in contact with one can put you at risk. "Coming in contact with any of your mucous membranes... ear, nose, mouth... or any saliva contact," said Commonwealth Health Physician Tina George, MD who added that the threat of rabies is nothing to be trifled with. "Rabies is universally fatal once symptoms develop which is why we're so aggressive about prophylaxing with any contact..."
that suggests a possible history of rabies." Prophylaxing is the term for the vaccine shots a person must get who's suspected of contracting rabies.

Think Of Me Animal Rescue is hosting a free public seminar Thursday afternoon, April 27th, from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. called 'Rabies Kills'. It's happening at Comfort Inn in Tunkhannock. Dr. Tony Labarbera, Regional Veterinarian for the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture will be presenting. Items covered will be prevalence of the rabies virus, how it is spread, incubation period, PA rabies law, vaccinations & quarantines used to control rabies in domestic animals & testing for rabies. Space will be limited. RSVP appreciated by Saturday, April 22nd by contacting Ofc. Devlin.