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STAFF REPORTS

The Tonawanda News (http://tonawanda-news.com)

Tonawanda News — GASPORT — A domestic short-hair feral cat, grayish in color, attacked a man on Berner Parkway on Thursday and was confirmed to have rabies Friday.

The Niagara County Department of Health Environmental Division Rabies Control Program have advised anyone who has come in contact with the cat, or any cat in the Berner Parkway area, to notify the Niagara County Department of Health at 439-7511 during business hours or 439-7430

after hours.

"The cat was really aggressive and attacked him," according to Michelle Donovan, the supervising public health sanitarian. "The gentleman had scratches and bites. He is undergoing treatment."

Timely treatment with rabies shots is 100 percent effective, according to the health department.

The cat was captured and its head was transported to the Wadsworth Laboratory in Albany, the only rabies center in the state outside of New York City, for a direct florescent antibody test.

"We have an average 30 or 40 rabid animals a year. We test about 1,500 a year," said Bob Rudd, the director of the rabies lab. "It's not normal, but a high enough proportion to keep people on their toes. Summer is our busiest time of the year."

The county is responsible for shipping samples, usually in special frozen gel packs by FedEx or UPS.

Berner Parkway is a short north and south road that curves from the Erie Canal to Orangeport Road. The cat was a member of a maintained colony of unvaccinated feral cats, according to the health department.

The vast majority of rabies cases occur in wild animals such as raccoons, skunks, bats and foxes. The Niagara County Environmental Division has tested about 40 animals for rabies this year with two raccoons being positive for the rabies virus. The animals were found in the Towns of Somerset and Royalton.

Health officers emphasize that keeping vaccinations current for dogs, cats and ferrets is crucial to prevention. A pet can act as a link between a rabid wild animal and a person. Residents should avoid feeding, or contact with wild animals and feral cats.

"We are concerned and taking precautions," Donovan said. "Please notify our office if any exposure occurred. People should not have contact with feral cats, or feed them and pet them."

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