

Pandemic contributing to rise in animal bites: health unit

This Week

With more people staying home and limiting travel during the pandemic, 2020 is shaping up to be another bad year for animal bites in the region.

From January to August, the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit has investigated 433 animal bite incidents in Haliburton County, Northumberland County and the City of Kawartha Lakes. With just under four months left on the 2020 calendar, the health unit is on pace to surpass more than 600 animal bites investigations for the second straight year. Last year, the health unit recorded 672 animal bites; the highest total in five years.

Health protection manager Richard Ovcharovich said there has been a marked increase in animal bite incidents over the last 18 months, the vast majority of the health unit's animal bite investigations have involved pets or domestic animals.

"If we spend more time around our pets and domestic animals than we do with those in the wild, this leaves us and our loved ones with a higher risk of bites, scratches and rabies exposure from animals that are literally near and dear to us," Ovcharovich explains.

Recently, the health unit is launching the Keep Bites at Bay campaign that aims to remind parents and pet owners to be responsible and extra careful, especially when children are around pets or other domestic animals.

"Never leave young children alone with an animal, even if it's a pet. Children may not know better and start to rile or incite even friendly animals to act out and attack," Ovcharovich notes. "In a matter of seconds, an animal can bite, scratch or attack a person leading to severe, long-lasting physical and emotional trauma."

The health unit must be notified any time an animal bites or scratches a person. Public health inspectors investigate each incident to determine if there is a risk of rabies to the victim. If a domestic animal is involved, it is quarantined for 10 days to confirm that it was not sick with rabies when it bit or scratched the person. The health unit provides rabies vaccine for a person, if deemed necessary by a health care provider.

If a bite occurs, people are encouraged to get the pet owner's contact information and take a picture of the animal or make note of specific features that can assist with a follow-up investigation.

For more information call 1-866-888-4577, ext. 5006, or visit www.hkpr.on.ca.