



For Immediate Release

Monday, April 27, 2015

Bats and Rabies: Capture the Bat

Bats are valuable to Michigan's environment; however, they can also carry rabies. Bats are the animals most often found to be rabid in Michigan and are the most common way that people in Michigan and the United States come in contact with rabies. Rabies can infect other mammals such as dogs, cats, foxes, coyotes, woodchucks, skunks and raccoons, which can also give rabies to humans.

Rabies is a fatal disease once symptoms develop. For that reason, an estimated 40,000 people in the U.S. receive rabies post-exposure treatment each year. Many of these cases happen after coming into contact with bats. Some of these treatments can be avoided if the bat can be collected and tested for rabies. If the bat tests negative for rabies, no treatment is necessary.

Bats and other mammals with rabies can potentially spread rabies to people or pets via a bite or scratch. However, in many human cases caused by bat rabies, there was no history of a bite from a bat. For that reason, bats are a special concern. Bats have very small teeth, and a bite from a bat may not be felt. Any direct contact with a bat means a possible exposure to rabies. Other possible exposures include finding a bat in the same room as a person who may not be aware that contact has occurred, such as a sleeping person, a child, or someone who is mentally disabled or intoxicated. If you think you may have been exposed to a bat, please **DO NOT LET THE BAT GO**.

Safely capture the bat for rabies testing and immediately contact the health department. If the bat is unavailable for testing, treatment will be recommended to prevent rabies. If the bat is tested and does not have rabies, treatment is not needed.

Follow these instructions to make sure that collection of a bat is done the right way to avoid contact with the bat:

- Gather these supplies: Leather work gloves, a small box or coffee can, a piece of cardboard, and tape
- Once the bat lands, wearing gloves, approach slowly and place the box or can over it
- Slide the piece of cardboard under the container, trapping the bat inside. Securely tape the cardboard to the container.
- If you wish to keep the bat alive, punch holes (no larger than ¼ inch in diameter) in the container for the bat to breathe. It is important not to damage the bat as this can interfere with the lab testing.
- Contact the Barry-Eaton District Health Department at 517-541-2641 in Charlotte or 269-798-4152 in Hastings to discuss whether the bat needs to be tested for rabies and to receive instructions on what steps to take next
- Seek medical attention for any bite or scratch

It is also important to protect your pets against rabies. The best way to do this is to have your dogs, cats and ferrets vaccinated against rabies by your veterinarian and to prevent your pets from coming into contact with wild animals while outside. If you think your pet might have been bitten or scratched by a wild animal, such as a bat, raccoon or skunk, please contact your veterinarian for instructions on how to prevent rabies.

For more information, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Rabies website at www.cdc.gov/rabies/ or the Barry-Eaton District Health Department's website at www.barryeatonhealth.org.

###END###

**Media Contact: Susan Peters
517-541-2652**