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Established in 1945, DuPage County Health Department promotes physical and emotional health; prevents illness injury and disability; protects health from environmental risk factors, and strives to assure the provision of accessible, quality service.

August 16, 2019

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Be Safe, Never Touch a Bat

DUPAGE COUNTY—This is the time of year when bats are most active and the DuPage County Health Department is warning residents to never touch or try to catch a bat or wild animal, especially in your home.

Several potential human exposures to rabies have been reported already in 2019, and preventive treatment has been recommended for 45 potentially exposed persons. Five bats have tested positive for rabies in DuPage County in 2019 to date.

Bats are the primary carriers of rabies in Illinois. You cannot tell by looking at a bat if it is rabid. The animal does not have to be aggressive or exhibit other symptoms to have rabies. Any wild mammal, such as a raccoon, skunk, fox, coyote, or bat, can have rabies and transmit it to humans.

Rabies is a virus that affects the nervous system of humans and other mammals. Humans can get rabies after being bitten by an infected animal. Rabies can also be contracted when saliva from a rabid animal gets directly into the eyes, nose, mouth, or a wound. Without preventive treatment, rabies is typically a fatal disease.

Changes in any animal's normal behavior, such as difficulty walking or an overall appearance of illness, can be early signs of rabies. A bat that is active during the day, found on the ground, and unable to fly is more likely to be rabid. Such bats should never be touched or handled.

If you have been bitten or exposed to a bat, seek immediate medical attention. Bat bites may not be felt while sleeping, and special consideration needs to be taken when a person awakens to a bat and also when a bat is found in the room with a previously unattended child, mentally disabled person, or intoxicated person. Preventive treatment with rabies immune globulin and a vaccine series must begin immediately.

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The following tips can help prevent the spread of rabies:

- Be a responsible pet owner. Keep vaccinations up-to-date for all pets.
- Seek immediate veterinary assistance if your pet is bitten by a wild animal or exposed to a bat.
- Call your local police department or your local animal control agency to remove stray animals from your neighborhood.
- Do not touch, feed, or attract wild animals with open garbage cans or litter.
- Never adopt wild animals or bring them into your home. Do not try to nurse sick animals to health. Call animal control or an animal rescue agency for assistance.
- Teach children never to handle unfamiliar animals, wild or domestic, even if they appear friendly. “Love your own, leave other animals alone” is a good principle for children to learn to reduce the risk of exposures to rabid animals.
- Maintain homes and other buildings so bats cannot gain entry.
- If a bat is in your home, do not kill or release the bat outdoors until after speaking with animal control and public health officials to help determine if you could have been exposed to rabies and need preventive treatment. If you are able to do so without putting yourself at risk for physical contact or being bitten, try to cover the bat with a large can or bucket, and close the door to the room. If the bat is available for testing and test results are negative, preventive treatment is not needed.

All animal bites to humans that occur in DuPage County must be reported to **DuPage County Animal Services at (630) 407-2800; fax reports to (630) 407-2801**. All potential human rabies exposures must be reported to the **DuPage County Health Department at (630) 221-7553, or after hours at (630) 682-7400**.

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