

111 N. County Farm Rd., Wheaton, IL 60187

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For Immediate Release

Prevent Rabies: Be Safe, Never Touch a Bat

DuPage County - This is the time of year when bats are most active. The DuPage County Health Department (DCHD) is reminding residents to never touch or try to catch a bat or wild animal, especially in your home.

Rabies is a deadly virus that affects the brain and nervous system. Humans and other mammals 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.

Preventive treatment with rabies immune globulin and vaccine series must begin immediately. Without preventive treatment following potential exposure to a rabid animal, rabies is typically a fatal disease.

If you have been bitten or exposed to a bat, seek immediate medical attention. If you wake up and find a bat in the room, it is considered an exposure, even if no bite marks are visible. Bat bites may not be felt while sleeping. Take special considerations to report the exposure and consult with your healthcare provider, especially when a bat is found in the room with a previously unattended child, mentally disabled person, or intoxicated person.

Bats are the primary source of rabies in Illinois. You may not be able to 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.

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.

Several potential human exposures to rabies have been reported already in 2023, and preventive treatment has been recommended for 56 DuPage County residents to date in 2023, by their healthcare provider and/or public health officials. No bats have tested positive for rabies in DuPage County in 2023 to date, though five bats tested positive for rabies in DuPage County in 2022.

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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.

Rabies in humans is 100 percent preventable. Understanding your risk and knowing what to do after a rabies exposure can keep you, your loved ones, and your pets safe.

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 exposure to rabid animals.
- Maintain homes and other buildings so bats cannot gain entry. Additional information on “Bats and Bat Exclusion” is available at [Bats and Bat Exclusion \(illinois.gov\)](http://illinois.gov)
- 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, your household members, or pets 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 or other animal 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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