



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 06-30-11

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Do you have bats in your belfry?

Stanton, MI- Summer has definitely returned, and so have the bats. Most people tend to avoid these creepy critters, and for good reason. Bats are the most common animal in Michigan to transmit rabies, a viral infection contracted through direct contact from an infected animal.

“Rabies is almost always fatal if left untreated,” said Dr. Graham, Medical Director for Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD). “For this reason, we are advising families to bat-proof their homes by making sure to repair any loose soffits, flashings, eaves and siding. Be sure to cover roof vents with screens, make sure all doors shut tightly with no gaps, and that window screens are not damaged or torn.”

Obviously, if you or a family member gets bitten by a bat, medical attention should be sought right away and the animal should be tested for rabies. However, because bats have small teeth which may leave marks that are not easily seen, there are situations in which you should take action, even in the absence of an obvious bite wound. According to Graham, if a bat is found in the room of a sleeping person, in the room of an unattended child, or near a mentally impaired or intoxicated person, it should definitely be tested for rabies. Determining whether or not the bat has rabies may spare family members from undergoing rabies vaccination treatment.

Most people do not realize that in order to be tested for rabies, a bat’s head must be kept intact, so hitting it with any type of object is not advised. To catch a bat safely, make sure to capture the bat without touching it with your bare skin (leather work gloves are ideal). Have a small box or coffee can, a piece of cardboard and tape ready. When the bat lands, approach it slowly. Place the box or coffee can over the bat and then slide the cardboard under the container to trap the bat inside. Tape the cardboard securely to the container and then contact the health department at 989-227-3111 (Clinton County), 989-875-1019 (Gratiot County), or 989-831-3615 (Montcalm County) for euthanizing instructions and to discuss testing and treatment options. It is important to note that the health department does not accept live bats. To see an actual video demonstration on safe bat capture, visit www.mmdhd.org (Click on “Community Health” and then on “Communicable Disease”).

Skunks, raccoons, foxes, and unvaccinated cats and dogs are also likely rabies carriers. To help protect yourself from rabies, avoid approaching or touching any wild or stray animal. If you have been bitten by a bat or other wild or stray animal, contact your health care provider immediately for treatment.

Mid-Michigan District Health Department serves the residents of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm Counties.

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