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What to do when you have a bat in your house

Ithaca, Stanton, St. Johns- While one can't argue that bats are beneficial to our ecosystem, they are pretty creepy and have one big downside: they are one of the most common animals in Michigan to transmit rabies, a disease that is fatal if left untreated. That's why, when it comes to bats, we are wise to keep our distance.

We encounter bats more often between May and September because that's when they are more active, searching for food and rearing their young. They would much rather be outside, but sometimes find themselves in our homes.

The only thing worse than finding a bat in your house is getting bitten by one. If a bite occurs; or if a bat is found near a sleeping person, a child, or someone who is mentally impaired or intoxicated; you should:

- Capture the bat in case it needs to be tested.
- Call the Mid-Michigan District Health Department at 989-227-3111 in Clinton County, 989-875-1019 in Gratiot County, or 989-831-3615 in Montcalm County. Communicable Disease nurses at the Health Department will assess your risk and determine if the bat needs to be tested. Please do not bring bats to the health department without calling first.
- Contact your doctor to see if you need treatment.

If a bat is found in the home but poses no threat, it most likely does not need to be tested for rabies. In this situation, you can capture the bat and set it free outside.

Capturing a bat isn't as difficult as you may think. First, you'll need to gather a few items: a pair of gloves (leather work gloves are ideal), a small box or coffee can, a piece of cardboard and tape. When the bat lands, approach it slowly. Place the box or coffee can over the bat and slide the cardboard under the container to trap the bat inside. Then, tape the cardboard securely to the container. Keep in mind that in order to be tested, a bat's head must be kept intact, so hitting it with any type of object, like a tennis racket, is not advised.

Keep bats out of your home by replacing loose soffits, flashings, eaves and siding. Also, cover roof vents with screens, make sure all doors shut tightly with no gaps, and that window screens are not damaged or torn.

Additional steps you can take to keep your family safe:

- Avoid contact with wildlife.
- If a wild animal appears sick, report it to the Department of Natural Resources online at Michigan.gov/eyesinthefield or call 517-336-5030.
- Protect your pets by getting them vaccinated against rabies.

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

We take action to protect, maintain and improve the health of our community.

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