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What to do when you have a bat in your house

Ithaca, Stanton, St. Johns- Bats have somewhat of a bad reputation, but they do have some good attributes, like eating their weight in bugs each night and helping to pollinate some of our favorite fruits. However, they do 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.

Avoiding bats is sometimes easier said than done, especially when one finds its way into your home. If this happens to you, be aware that there are a several instances where the bat might need to be captured for rabies testing. These instances are: if a bat is found near a sleeping person, someone who is intoxicated, a child, or a mentally impaired person, or if a bite occurs.

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 to be tested, a bat's head must be kept intact, so hitting it with any type of object, like a tennis racket or a baseball bat is not advised.

The only thing worse than finding a bat in your house is getting bitten by one. If this should happen:

- Immediately wash the wound with a water and iodine solution, which has been shown to reduce the likelihood of rabies.
- 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. A Communicable Disease nurse 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.
- Call your doctor to see if you need to be treated for rabies.

You can prevent bats from entering 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.

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