

Contact Information:

Mid-Michigan District Health Department
Brady Guilbault
(616) 788-3008
bguilbault@mmdhd.org

**Release Date:**

6/9/2023

Rabies, Animal Bites, and Wild Animal Encounters

St. Johns, Stanton, Ithaca, MI – The Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) is reminding residents the dangers of animal bites, whether wild, stray, or domestic, as animals may be infected with rabies. Rabies is a deadly but preventable viral disease, and most cases are in wildlife, including bats, raccoons, skunks, and foxes. Rabies can spread to people and pets through an infected, or rabid, animal's bites or scratches.

It is important for residents **NOT** to interact with (pet, play with, etc.) wild or stray animals. Tom Clark, Director of Gratiot County Animal Control says, "If you encounter a stray dog, don't run away, make any sudden movements, or look them in the eye. Quick movements can trigger their 'prey drive.'"

Residents may also encounter wild baby animals, such as a deer, fox, or racoons. It is important to leave the animals alone.

The law requires all animal bites be reported to local Animal Control and your local Health Department. When a bite occurs, make sure to capture the following information:

- Address of where the bite occurred
- Name and phone number of the owner of the biting animal
- Rabies vaccination status of the biting animal
- A good description of the biting animal

If a domestic animal bites a person, it doesn't necessarily mean the animal will be put down, nor will the owner face punishment. Local Health Departments and Animal Control Officers need specific information surrounding the incident to best provide education and to assist in determining possible rabies exposure. Domestic biting animals need to be quarantined for 10 days but may not need to be removed from their owner unless surrendered or dangerous.

In Michigan, rabies most commonly occurs in bats, therefore, it is important to prevent bats from entering living quarters or occupied spaces in homes, churches, schools, or other similar settings. In situations where a bat has been in close contact with people, if possible, safely confine the bat and contact your local Health Department to determine if it should be tested for rabies. A tutorial on how to catch a bat can be found on YouTube, titled: "How to Safely Catch a Bat" published by NYSDOH NY. If testing is required, the brain of the animal must be

intact. The local Health Department or Animal Control can provide you with best practices to safely deal with the bat.

If residents are unable to contact their local Health Department or Animal Control, and the captured bat is no longer living, the animal should never be put in the freezer. Freezing will delay test results from the state lab. Specimens must be refrigerated until ready to ship.

For further information, visit Michigan.gov/Rabies. To speak to your local MMDHD Communicable Disease (CD) Nurse, their contact information is listed below. For after hours, weekend, and holiday emergencies, use the After-Hours Emergency Pager.

- **Clinton County:** Becky Stoddard, (989) 227-3111
- **Gratiot County:** Lisa Mikesell, (989) 875-1019
- **Montcalm County:** Jennifer Johnson, (989) 831-3615
- **After-Hours Emergency Pager:** (989) 276-0260

To reach Animal Control, you can call:

- **Clinton County:** (989) 224-5116
- **Gratiot County:** (989) 875-2221
- **Montcalm County:** (989) 831-7302

###

The Mid-Michigan District Health Department has proudly served the residents of Clinton, Gratiot, and Montcalm Counties since 1966. We take action to protect, maintain and improve the health of our community.