

Subject: Rabies

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: August 9, 2007

Media Contact: Maureen Petzko, Director of Operations 517-279-9561 x 107

Several possible rabies cases raise concern as summer heats up.

With a handful of recent reports of suspected rabies exposures, mostly due to bats, the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency is warning residents of our area to be cautious of bats, wild animals, and stray dogs and cats. Based on trends in recent years, June, July and August have the highest incidence of animal bites, probably due to more time outdoors, kids being out of school, bats looking for a cool place to roost (your house for example) and just the natural proximity to animals that often bite people (bats, raccoons, skunks, cats and dogs). More than 75 animal bites to humans have been reported in the past 2 months, 33 in July alone.

While most animal bites probably do not result in exposure to rabies, the possibility is always there and the results can be dangerous as well as deadly. Rabies is a virus that attacks the brain and nervous system. The rabies virus lives in the saliva of infected animals and is usually spread from animals to humans by a bite or scratch. If left untreated in humans, rabies is fatal. Many animals can carry rabies; however, **humans have the greatest chance of being infected with the rabies virus through contact with bats and unvaccinated cats and dogs.**

Signs and symptoms of Rabies

Fever and/or Headache

Anxiety

Insomnia

Hyper-Salivation (foaming at the mouth)

Loss of Consciousness

Convulsions

Without medical attention, these symptoms appear within 20 to 60 days. Once a person begins to experience rabies symptoms, death usually follows. If you think you have been bitten or exposed to an animal (domestic or wild) that you suspect has rabies, **don't wait!** Go to the nearest hospital emergency room or medical professional as soon as possible. Even though an animal may seem normal, it can still carry the rabies virus. Following exposure, the only way to avoid rabies' deadly symptoms is to get medical attention **IMMEDIATELY!!**

Prevention/Treatment - As soon as possible after being bitten, treatment should begin even if the animal is merely suspected of having rabies; **CONSULT A MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL IMMEDIATELY!** Rabies is treatable with a series of vaccines but they must be started in a timely manner.

For additional information about rabies, visit our website or the CDC at:

www.bhsj.org/Clinic/CDFactSheets/rabies-qa-forwebsite.pdf

www.cdc.gov/healthypets/diseases/rabies.htm

www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/kidsrabies/FastFacts/rabies.htm