

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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FOR RELEASE: IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Health Officials Report: Third Case of Rabies Found in Local Bats

Coldwater, MI. Yesterday, the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency confirmed that another bat has tested positive for rabies. This is the third positive animal rabies case in Branch County since May of 2015. While there was no human exposure with this case, there was possibly some pet exposure. Earlier in the fall, an adult was exposed to a rabid bat and is currently undergoing treatment. The first bat tested positive in May and the exposure resulted in treatment.

Rabies is a viral disease that attacks the brain and nervous system and is transmitted through the bite of an infected animal or through the contamination of a fresh wound with saliva from an infected animal. Rabies is completely preventable if post-exposure shots are administered after contact with a rabid animal.

Rabies can be prevented by taking the following precautions:

- Do not handle or touch live or dead feral animals, animals you do not know, or wild animals such as bats, skunks, raccoons, foxes and coyotes that can carry rabies.
- If you see a dog or cat acting strangely, contact your local Animal Control officials.
- Vaccinate animals using an approved vaccine as required by state law.
- A bat that is active by day, found in a place where bats are not usually seen, or that is unable to fly, and is easily approached, could have rabies and should be avoided.

- Wash any wound from an animal thoroughly with soap and water and seek medical attention immediately.

As the weather gets colder, bats try to move indoors to hibernate where it is warmer. According to Kim Wilhelm, Prevention Services Director for the tri-county health department, “Many of the human rabies cases have been caused by a bat-stain of the virus. There was no known history of a bite from a bat. For that reason, bats represent a special concern.” Bats have very small teeth, and a bite from a bat may not be felt. *Any direct contact with a bat represents a potential exposure to rabies.* Kim Wilhelm adds “If you think you may have been exposed to rabies from a bat, please **DO NOT LET THE BAT GO**. In these instances, you should safely collect the bat until the need for rabies testing has been evaluated.”

If you think you may have been bitten by a bat, or if you find the bat in a bedroom in of a sleeping or incapacitated individual, the health department suggests taking the following steps to capture the bat in order to have it tested for rabies:

- Isolate the bat in a room;
- Put on leather gloves and get a small empty box or coffee can;
- When the bat lands, approach it slowly, while wearing the gloves, and place the box or coffee can over it;
- Slide the cardboard under the container to trap the bat inside;
- Tape the cardboard to the container securely, and punch small holes in the cardboard, allowing the bat to breathe;
- Store the bat in a cool place until you can get it to the health department.
- **IMPORTANT:** Do not freeze or smash the bat. Doing so may impact the laboratory’s ability to get an accurate test result.

Because of the possibility of rabies being transmitted to other wild animals by bats, health officials warn everyone who may have been bitten or scratched by a feral (wild) cat or other wild animal to contact the health department, as well. A suspect case of rabies caused by a raccoon bite occurred earlier in the year and has resulted in treatment of a child.

Bats are important part of any local ecosystem, with some species eating significant numbers of potential agricultural pests such as beetles and moths. Bats are

a protected species in Michigan; however, bats can carry rabies and are a significant source of potential rabies exposure for humans. Although human rabies cases are rare, the vast majority of recent cases have been caused by strains of rabies virus associated with bats.

For more information about rabies, including signs, symptoms and treatment, visit our website at www.bhsj.org and click on “Quick Info About Health Topics” button located on the left side.

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