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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BHSJ CHA sees Increase in Requests to Test Bats for Rabies

Coldwater, MI. – The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency has seen an increase in calls and requests for rabies testing of bats that have been found in homes. Bats are an important part of a healthy ecosystem and are a natural predator of mosquitoes, and are not the only potential carrier for rabies.

Any wild or un-vaccinated domestic animal has the potential to carry the rabies virus. The rabies virus lives in the saliva of infected animals. It is usually spread from animal to animal or from animal to human through a bite. You can take these simple steps to protect yourself and your pets:

- Never approach or touch any wild animals, especially bats, skunks, and raccoon, or stray animals.
- Do not feed wild animals. If you store food, pet food, or garbage outside, keep it in a sturdy container with a tight-fitting lid.
- Install a chimney cap to prevent bats, raccoon and other animals from entering your home.
- Seal openings around your home such as attics, crawl spaces, or areas under your porch or deck, to prevent animals from living there.
- Make sure your pets are current on their rabies vaccinations. Contact your Veterinarian for more information.
- Contact a wildlife removal service or county animal control agent who may be able to remove or relocate the animal.

There are situations in which a person could be bitten by a bat and not know it. If you find a bat in a room with a sleeping person, an unattended child, a mentally impaired person, or an intoxicated person, or you know you were bitten or scratched by a bat, a wild animal, unknown dog, or unknown cat, take the following steps right away:

- Immediately wash the wound well with soap and water.
- Secure the animal, if you can, taking care to prevent additional bites. If the animal is a pet, get the pet owner's name, address, and telephone number.
- Contact your local health department or animal control agency to report the bite and decide what should be done about the animal. Please call first before bringing a live animal to our office.
- If an animal must be killed, do not damage the head. Rabies testing is done on the brain.
- When dealing with a dead animal, wear gloves or use a shovel to move the animal. Put the animal's body in a heavy-duty plastic bag and place in a protected area away from people and other animals. If an animal must be stored for testing, keep it cold but do not freeze.
- Do not delay seeking medical advice. Contact your family doctor or visit the nearest emergency room. Rabies can be prevented with prompt treatment.

Rabies can be fatal to humans if left untreated. Post exposure treatment is given to people who are exposed to a potentially rabid animal. Treatment is not necessary if the animal tests negative for rabies. More information about rabies and a map of rabies positive animals in Michigan can be found at Michigan.gov/rabies.

The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency is committed to promoting wellness, preventing disease, providing health care, and protecting the environment. For more information, contact your local office, visit www.bhsj.org, follow us on Facebook www.facebook.com/BHSJCHA or Instagram www.instagram.com/bhsj_healthagency.

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