



NEWS

R E L E A S E

Illinois Department of Public Health

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State Public Health Director Warns People To Avoid Contact With Bats

Dozens of bat exposures already documented as we enter busy bat season

SPRINGFIELD – Illinois Department of Public Health Director Dr. Damon T. Arnold is warning Illinoisans to avoid contact with bats as we approach the time of year when bats are the most active. Bats are the primary carrier of rabies in Illinois and already this year, 43 bats have tested positive for rabies in 12 counties.

“In the last several years there have been more reports about contact with bats and the Department has already received numerous phone calls this summer about people being exposed to bats,” said Dr. Arnold. “It’s important to remember that you should never try to approach or catch a bat in your home. Instead, call your local animal control agency for its recommendations.”

In 2009, 83 bats tested positive for rabies in Illinois.

Rabies is a virus that affects the nervous system of humans and other mammals. Humans get rabies after being bitten by an infected animal. Rabies can also be contracted when saliva from a rabid animal gets directly into the eyes, nose, mouth or a wound. Without preventive treatment, rabies is a fatal disease.

“You cannot tell by looking at a bat if it is rabid. The animal does not have to be aggressive or exhibit other symptoms to have rabies,” said Connie Austin, state public health veterinarian. “Any wild mammal, such as a raccoon, skunk, fox, coyote or bat, can have rabies and transmit it to humans.”

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Changes in any animal's normal behavior, such as difficulty walking or an overall appearance of illness, can be early signs of rabies. For example, rabid skunks, which normally are nocturnal and avoid contact with people, may approach humans during daylight hours. A bat that is active during the day, found on the ground, or is unable to fly, is more likely than others to be rabid. Such bats are often easily approached, but should never be handled.

The following tips can help prevent the spread of rabies:

- Be a responsible pet owner. Keep vaccinations up-to-date for all dogs, cats and ferrets.
- Seek veterinary assistance for your pet immediately if your pet is bitten by a wild animal or exposed to a bat.
- Call the local animal control agency to remove stray animals in your neighborhood.
- Do not handle, feed or unintentionally attract wild animals with open garbage cans or litter.
- Never adopt wild animals or bring them into your home. Do not try to nurse sick animals to health. Call animal control or an animal rescue agency for assistance.
- Teach children never to handle unfamiliar animals, wild or domestic, even if they appear friendly. "Love your own, leave other animals alone" is a good principle for children to learn to reduce the risk of exposures to rabid animals.
- Maintain homes and other buildings so bats cannot gain entry.

Information about excluding bats may be found at www.idph.state.il.us/envhealth/pcbats.htm.

Information about rabies can be found at www.idph.state.il.us/health/infect/reportdis/rabies.htm.

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