

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Residents need to take precautions whenever they encounter a bat or wild animal

McDonough County, Ill. – Recently, the McDonough County Health Department has received an increase in calls regarding bats being found in homes. Bats are the primary carrier of rabies in Illinois, although any wild mammal, such as a dog, cat, raccoon, skunk, fox, and coyote can also carry rabies. Rabies is a deadly disease caused by a virus that attacks the central nervous system. The virus is present primarily in the saliva, brain tissue, and spinal fluid of a rabid animal. Humans can get rabies after being bitten by an infected animal. Humans can also be exposed to rabies when saliva from a rabid animal gets directly into the eyes, nose, mouth or a wound.

There are around 12 species of bats in Illinois which are protected by law; bats are nocturnal mammals and pose little risk when flying around at night. In fact bats are the only mammals that fly and one bat will consume around 3, 000 insects in one night. Bats play a very vital role in Illinois and should always be respected just like any other wild animal.

The best way to prevent and control bats is by exclusion; exclude bats by sealing exterior openings. Exclusion should take place in late summer or early fall. A list of wildlife control specialists, who may be familiar with bat exclusion procedures, can be obtained from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources at (217)782-6302.

If you have contact with a bat or find a bat in a room with a sleeping person or a young child:

1. Seek medical attention immediately. Report this information to your local health department.
2. Wash the wound and hands, or any place that has come into contact with the bat or wild animal with soap and water.
3. The animal should be captured without damaging its head and only if direct contact with the animal is avoided (using a bucket or large container to restrain the bat). When there is a dog or cat bite, the pet must be captured and observed professionally for 10 days. Bats must be euthanized and tested.
4. If the animal tests positive for rabies, PEP (Post Exposure Prophylaxis) needs to be started immediately.

Preventative steps include:

1. Do not handle, feed or unintentionally attract wild animals with open garbage cans or litter.
2. Be a responsible pet owner. Keep vaccinations up-to-date for all dogs, cats and ferrets.
3. 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.

4. 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.

To learn more about bat excluding and rabies visit the Illinois Department of Public Health website or contact the McDonough County Health Department Environmental Health Division at (309)837-9951 extension 217.