

IDPH warns public to watch out for rabid bats, animals

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SPRINGFIELD - Bats are starting to become more active, which means the possibility of exposure to rabies is increasing. Bats are the primary carrier of rabies in Illinois. The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) has already had 10 bats test positive for rabies this year.

"Never try to approach or catch a bat, or any wild animal, you find outside. Bats and wild animals that let people approach them are often not healthy," said IDPH Director Nirav D. Shah, M.D., J.D. "Instead, call your local animal control agency for its recommendations on how to handle the animal."

In 2015, 97 bats tested positive for rabies in Illinois. Any wild mammal, such as raccoons, skunks, foxes, coyotes and bats, can have rabies and transmit it to humans.

Rabies is a virus that affects the nervous system. People can get rabies after being bitten by an infected animal. Rabies can also be contracted when saliva from a rabid animal gets directly into a person's eyes, nose, mouth or a wound. People usually know when they have been bitten by a bat, but bats have very small teeth and the bite mark may not

be easy to see. If you find yourself in close proximity to a bat and are not sure if you were exposed, for example – you wake up and find a bat in your room, do not kill or release the bat before calling your doctor or local health department to help determine if you could have been exposed to rabies and need preventive treatment. If the bat is available for testing and test results are negative, preventive treatment is not needed.

Without preventive treatment, rabies is typically fatal. If you have been bitten or have had direct contact with a bat, seek immediate medical attention. Treatment with rabies immune globulin and a vaccine series must begin quickly.

An animal does not have to be aggressive or exhibit other symptoms to have rabies. Changes in any animal's normal behavior can be early signs of rabies. 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:

- Keep vaccinations up-to-date for all dogs, cats, ferrets, and other animals you own.
- Do not touch, 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, wild 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 get inside.
- If a bat is in your home, do not release the bat outdoors until after speaking with animal control or public health officials. If you can do it without putting yourself at risk for physical contact or being bitten, try to cover the bat with a large can or bucket, and close the door to the room.

For more information about keeping bats out of your home, check out the Bats and Bat Exclusion page on our website.