



The Illinois Department Of Public Health Is Reporting The First Human Case Of Rabies In Illinois Since 1954

September 29 2021 11:34 AM



SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is reporting the first human case of rabies in Illinois since 1954. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) today confirmed the diagnosis after testing at its lab.

In mid-August, a Lake County resident in his 80s awoke to a bat on his neck. The bat was captured and tested positive for rabies. The individual was advised he needed to start postexposure rabies treatment but declined. One month later, the individual began experiencing symptoms consistent with rabies, including neck pain, headache, difficulty controlling his arms, finger numbness, and difficulty speaking. The individual subsequently died. People who had contact with secretions from the individual were assessed and given rabies preventive treatment as needed.

“Rabies has the highest mortality rate of any disease,” said IDPH Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike. “However, there is a life-saving treatment for individuals who quickly seek care after being exposed to an animal with rabies. If you think you may have been exposed to rabies, immediately seek medical attention and follow the recommendations of health care providers and public health officials.”

While cases of human rabies in the United States are rare with only 1 to 3 cases reported each year, rabies exposures are still common with an estimated 60,000 Americans receiving the post-exposure vaccination series each year. The rabies virus infects the central nervous system, ultimately causing disease in the brain and death. Without preventive treatment, rabies is typically fatal.

“Sadly, this case underscores the importance of raising public awareness about the risk of rabies exposure in the United States,” said Lake County Health Department Executive Director Mark Pfister. “Rabies infections in people are rare in the United States; however, once symptoms begin, rabies is almost always fatal, making it vital that an exposed person receive appropriate treatment to prevent the onset of rabies as soon as possible.”

Bats are the most commonly identified species with rabies in Illinois. Wildlife experts did find a bat colony in the home of the individual who died.

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, (e.g., you wake up and find a bat in your room), do not release the bat as it should be appropriately captured for rabies testing. Call your doctor or local health department to help determine if you could have been exposed to rabies and if you need preventive treatment. Call your local animal care and control to safely remove the bat.

If the bat is available for testing and the results are negative, preventive treatment is not needed. The only way rabies can be confirmed in a bat is through laboratory testing. You cannot tell just by looking at a bat if it has rabies.

So far this year, 30 bats have tested positive for rabies in Illinois. More than 1,000 bats are tested for rabies each year in Illinois due to possible exposure. Approximately 3% of tested bats are positive for rabies.

More information about [rabies](#) and how to keep [bats out of your home](#) can be found on the [IDPH website](#).