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## PRESS RELEASE

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### Be safe, never touch a bat

This is the time of year when bats are most active and the DuPage County Health Department is warning county residents to never touch or try to catch a bat or wild animal, especially in your home.

Bats are the primary carriers of rabies in Illinois. 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. Any wild mammal, such as a raccoon, skunk, fox, coyote or bat, can have rabies and transmit it to humans.

Changes in any animal's normal behavior, such as difficulty walking or an overall appearance of illness, can be early signs of rabies. A bat that is active during the day, found on the ground and unable to fly, is more likely to be rabid. Such bats should never be touched or handled.

Rabies is a virus that affects the nervous system of humans and other mammals. Humans can 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 typically a fatal disease. If you have been bitten or exposed to a bat, seek immediate medical attention. Bat bites may not be felt while sleeping, and special consideration needs to be taken when a person awakens to a bat and also when a bat is found in a child's room or in a mentally disabled or intoxicated person's living area. Preventive treatment with rabies immune globulin and a vaccine series must begin immediately.

Six bats have tested positive in DuPage County so far this year, two of which were involved in potential rabies exposures. The number of positive bats this year to date is slightly higher than previous years, perhaps reflecting more active bats earlier this summer alongside increased community awareness. Preventive treatment has been recommended for 13 potentially exposed persons.

The following tips can help prevent the spread of rabies:

- Be a responsible pet owner. Keep vaccinations up-to-date for all pets.
- Seek immediate veterinary assistance if your pet is bitten by a wild animal or exposed to a bat.
- Call your local police department or your local animal control agency to remove stray animals from your neighborhood.



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- Do not touch, feed or 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.
- If a bat is in your home, do not kill or release the bat outdoors until after speaking with animal control and public health officials to help determine if you could have been exposed to rabies and need preventive treatment. If you are able to do so 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. If the bat is available for testing and test results are negative, preventive treatment is not needed.

All animal bites to humans that occur in DuPage County must be reported to **DuPage County Animal Care and Control** at [\(630\) 407-2800](tel:(630)407-2800); fax reports to [\(630\) 407-2801](tel:(630)407-2801). All potential human rabies exposures must be reported to the **DuPage County Health Department** at [\(630\) 221-7553](tel:(630)221-7553), or after hours at [\(630\) 682-7400](tel:(630)682-7400).

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