

Aug. 14, 2009

News media calls to David Hass at (630) 682-7979, ext. 7374.

## **DuPage County Health Department warns residents to avoid contact with bats**

The DuPage County Health Department is warning county residents 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.

So far this season there have been six bats testing positive for rabies and additional exposures to bats have been reported in DuPage County.

All animal bites to humans that occur in DuPage County must be reported to **Animal Care and Control at (630) 407-2800**. All potential rabies exposures must be reported to **the DuPage County Health Department at (630) 682-7979, ext. 7553**.

“In the last several years there have been an above average number of rabies cases in bats in Illinois. We’ve already received numerous phone calls this summer about people being exposed to bats,” said Dr. Damon Arnold, Illinois Department of Public Health Director. “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, which is the police department in many communities, for their recommendations.”

Rabies is a virus that affects the nervous system of humans and other mammals. Humans get rabies after being bitten by an infected animal. If infectious material from a rabid animal, such as saliva, gets directly into the eyes, nose, mouth or a wound, rabies can result. 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 foaming at the mouth or be exhibiting other symptoms to have rabies,” said Dr. 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.”

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.

**(More)**

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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.

Information about excluding bats may be found at <http://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](http://www.idph.state.il.us/health/infect/reportdis/rabies.htm).

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