



## Press Release

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### **Avoid possible exposure to rabies by avoiding bats and wild animals**

Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH) officials remind residents that bats are active this time of year, which means the possibility of exposure to rabies is increasing. Three bats have tested positive for rabies and one rabies exposure has occurred so far this year in suburban Cook County.

Rabies is a virus that affects the nervous system of humans and other mammals. A person may contract rabies through a bite, scratch, or saliva from an infected animal. A bat bite or scratch may not be seen or even felt by the injured person due to the small size of its teeth and claws. A potential rabies exposure should never be taken lightly. If untreated, rabies is fatal.

“If you find yourself in close proximity to a bat, dead or alive, do not touch, hit or destroy it and do not try and remove it from your home,” said CCDPH chief operating officer Terry Mason, MD, FACS. “Call your local animal control office to collect the bat and call your healthcare provider or local public health department immediately to report the exposure and determine if preventive treatment is needed. If the bat is available for testing and test results are negative, preventive treatment is not needed.”

Animals do not have to be aggressive or behaving erratically to have rabies. Changes in any animal’s normal behavior can be early signs of rabies. Bats that are on the ground, unable to fly, or active during the day are more likely than others to be rabid. Such bats are often easily approached but should never be handled.

Recommendations to help prevent the spread of rabies:

- If a bat is in your home, do not release the bat outdoors until after speaking with animal control or public health officials. It may be possible to test the bat and avoid the need to receive rabies treatment.
- If you wake to a bat in the room you may need to be treated if the bat cannot be tested.
- Keep vaccinations up-to-date for all dogs, cats, ferrets and other animals you own. To find low cost Cook County clinics, visit: <http://www.cookcountylil.gov/animal-rabies-control-home/>.
- Seek immediate veterinary assistance for your pet if your pet is bitten by a wild animal or exposed to a bat.
- Call your local animal control office about removing stray animals in your neighborhood. Never adopt wild animals, bring them into your home, or try to nurse sick, wild animals to health.
- Do not touch, feed or unintentionally attract wild animals with open garbage cans or litter.
- Teach children never to handle unfamiliar animals, wild or domestic, even if they appear friendly.
- Maintain homes and other buildings so bats cannot get inside.
- Call your local animal control office or Cook County Animal and Rabies Control (708-974-6140) to report a bat in your home or a dead bat on your property.
- Call the CCDPH at 708-633-4000 to report human exposure to a bat.
- For more information about rabies, visit: <http://www.idph.state.il.us/public/hb/hbrabies.htm>.

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