

District Health Department #4

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Another Bat confirmed infected with rabies in Alpena County

Another bat was confirmed to have been infected with rabies in Alpena County, prompting public health officials to remind residents and visitors to reduce their exposure to rabies. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Bats should not be handled and should be excluded from living areas by using screens on windows and doors.
- Bats can transmit rabies through bites or scratches that penetrate the skin.
- People are at risk for contracting rabies from a bat only if there is an exposure. An exposure is defined by being bitten, scratched, or being asleep in a room where a bat is present. A child or person who cannot communicate about a potential exposure who is found in a room with a bat is also considered exposed.
- If there is an exposure, it is best to have the bat captured, euthanized, and brought into the health department for testing. There is no need for testing in cases where there was no human exposure. If your pets are potentially exposed, you should contact your veterinarian.

People cannot get rabies just from seeing a bat in an attic, in a cave or at a distance. In addition, people cannot get rabies from having contact with bat guano (feces), blood or urine or from touching a bat on its fur (even though bats should never be handled). If you are bitten by a bat - or infectious material (such as saliva) from a bat gets into your eyes, nose mouth or a wound - wash the affected area thoroughly and get medical attention immediately.

Exposure to rabies is not an emergency, but decisions must not be delayed. According to Joshua Meyerson, MD, Medical Director for District Health Department No. 4, "if you are bitten or clawed by an animal, you should wash the area thoroughly and contact your health care provider immediately if treatment is needed. Next, call your local Health Department office to determine the need for rabies vaccination."

"Before we recommend rabies vaccine, we'll review the type of exposure you had when it happened, the animal you were exposed to, as well as laboratory and surveillance information for the area where the exposure occurred," he said.

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The best way to prevent rabies is to avoid contact with potentially infected animals. Parents should advise children not to pet or touch wild animals. Never approach or handle any animal that looks or acts ill or behaves strangely. In addition, vaccinate your pets against rabies.

The CDC recommends the following steps to avoid exposure to animals infected with rabies:

- Vaccinate all pet dogs, cats, ferrets and other animals that have frequent contact with humans. Consider vaccinating horses and other livestock.

District Health Department No. 4 serves Alpena, Cheboygan, Montmorency and Presque Isle counties since 1930. Our mission is to promote and protect the health of people and the communities where we live, learn, work and play.

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