

# ***Rabies***

**Rabies is a viral disease that attacks the nervous systems of humans and mammals. It is most commonly found in bats, skunks, foxes, and raccoons. Unvaccinated pets or livestock can also be infected.**

## **How is rabies spread?**

Rabies is spread when an animal or human is bitten or scratched by an infected animal, or if an infected animal's saliva comes in contact with broken skin or mucous membranes.

## **How can I protect myself?**

Because the majority of rabies cases in people in the United States are contracted from wild animals, people should avoid contact with them — especially bats, skunks, and raccoons.

## **How can I protect my home?**

Some simple steps can be taken to make your home less appealing to wild animals:

- ◆ Never approach or touch wild or stray animals or pets that you don't know well.
- ◆ Do not encourage any wild animal to live in your neighborhood by making pet food, garbage or handouts available to them.
- ◆ Install a chimney cap to prevent raccoons and other animals from living in your home.
- ◆ Seal areas around your home that animals may use as a den, such as an attic, crawl space, or areas under your porch or deck.

## **What are the signs of rabies in animals?**

It is not always possible to determine that an animal is infected with rabies by simple observation. Signs in an animal which should lead you to suspect that it may be rabid are:

- ◆ Nervousness
- ◆ Aggressiveness
- ◆ Excessive drooling and foaming at the mouth
- ◆ Abnormal behavior such as:
  - Wild animals losing their fear of human beings
  - Animals normally active at night being seen during the day.

## **What do I need to know about bats and rabies?**

Since 1980, the majority of cases of human rabies diagnosed in the United States have been associated with bat rabies virus. The most frequently found rabid animal in Michigan is the bat. People normally know when they have been bitten by a bat. However, bats have small teeth that may not leave easily identifiable marks.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends post-exposure treatment when there is reasonable probability that contact with a bat could have occurred and rabies cannot be ruled out through prompt testing of the bat. If you find a bat in the room of:

- ◆ A sleeping person
- ◆ An unattended child
- ◆ Someone mentally or physically challenged
- ◆ An intoxicated individual

you should save the bat for testing and seek medical attention immediately. Call Kalamazoo County Animal Services and Enforcement to capture the animal or for advice on how to capture the animal.

If professional help is unavailable, use precautions to capture the bat safely — wear leather gloves and when the bat lands, approach it slowly. Place a box or coffee can over the bat. Punch holes in a piece of cardboard to allow the bat to breathe, and slide it under the container to trap the bat inside. Tape the cardboard to the container to secure it. Contact Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services or Animal Services and Enforcement to arrange for rabies testing.

**Kalamazoo County Public Health  
Emergency Information Line:  
269-373-5300**

Take care to prevent additional bites. Do not damage the head. Rabies testing is done on the brain.

When dealing with a dead bat, wear gloves or use a shovel to move the animal. Put the bat's body in a heavy-duty plastic bag and place in a protected area away from people and other animals. If necessary, a bat may be kept overnight on ice or in a refrigerator until it can be picked up for testing. Do not freeze. Clean the area and any tools used to remove the bat with one part bleach to ten parts water.

### **What should I do if I've been bitten by a bat?**

- ◆ Immediately wash the wound with lots of soap and water.
- ◆ Capture the bat (if possible) so it can be checked for rabies.
- ◆ Do not delay seeking medical attention. Go to your family doctor or to the nearest emergency room. Also, call Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services immediately. Some people are afraid to seek treatment because they have heard it involves a series of painful shots to the abdomen. This is no longer true.

### **What should I do if my pet is exposed to a bat or other wild animal?**

If you think your pet or domestic animal has been bitten by a bat or other wild animal, contact your veterinarian or Kalamazoo County Animal Services and Enforcement to have the bat tested for rabies. Remember to keep vaccinations current for cats, dogs, and other animals.

### **How can I keep bats out of my home?**

Some bats live in buildings, and there may be no reason to evict them if there is little chance for contact with people. However, bats should always be prevented from entering rooms of your home. For assistance with "bat-proofing" your home, call Animal Services and Enforcement. If you choose to do the "bat-proofing" yourself, here are a couple things to remember:

- ◆ During summer, many young bats are unable to fly. If you exclude adult bats during this time, the young may be trapped inside. Thus, if possible, avoid exclusion from May through August.
- ◆ Most bats leave in the fall or winter to hibernate, so these are the best times to "bat-proof" your home.

### **How can rabies be prevented?**

- ◆ 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.
- ◆ Wash any wound from an animal thoroughly with soap and water and seek medical attention immediately.
- ◆ Have all dead, sick, or easily captured bats tested for rabies if exposure to people or pets occurs.
- ◆ Prevent bats from entering living quarters or occupied spaces in homes, churches, schools, and other similar areas where they might contact people and pets.
- ◆ Be a responsible pet owner by keeping vaccinations current for all dogs, cats, and ferrets, keeping your cats and ferrets inside and your dogs under direct supervision, calling Animal Services and Enforcement to remove stray animals from your neighborhood and, if you have not already done so, have your pets spayed or neutered.

**Kalamazoo County  
Health & Community Services**

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