



Commonwealth of Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services

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Reduce Potential Rabies Exposure by Avoiding Bats and Wild Animals

FRANKFORT, KY (Jul. 15, 2019) – The Kentucky Department for Public Health (DPH), within the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS), along with local health departments across the state, is reminding the public about the potential for rabies exposure from contact with bats and other wildlife.

“Bats become active during this time of year and that increases the possibility of exposure to rabies, which is a dangerous and life-threatening condition if contracted,” said Kelly Giesbrecht, DVM, MPH, state public health veterinarian with DPH. “We want to highlight the importance of rabies prevention and control efforts in our communities, while also reminding Kentuckians of the existing dangers of coming into contact with rabid bats and other wildlife. To avoid possible rabies exposure, wildlife should not be fed, handled or treated as pets.”

Rabies is a virus that affects the nervous system in humans, pets and wild animals. A person may contract rabies through a bite, scratch or saliva from an infected animal.

Due to the small size of its teeth and claws, a bat bite or scratch may not be seen or even felt by the injured person. A potential rabies exposure should never be taken lightly. If untreated, rabies is fatal.

Bats that are active during the day or are unable to fly might be suspect for having rabies. To minimize the risk for contracting rabies, it is best never to handle any bat. If you find a bat in your home, call your local animal control office to collect the bat and call your healthcare provider or local health department to determine if preventive treatment is needed. Not all bats are positive, only a small percentage. However, caution should still be used around all bats. Bats are also very beneficial. They eat 600-1000 mosquitoes hourly!

To prevent bats from entering your home, carefully examine your home for holes that might allow bats to enter the residence. Any openings larger than a quarter-inch could allow for bat entry. These openings should be blocked either with stainless steel wool or caulking in the fall or winter so you do not unintentionally trap bats within your home. Between May and August, while bats are raising their young, it is illegal to remove bats. Consult with Kentucky Fish and Wildlife if you have a bat problem in your home during these months. Common ways for bats to enter homes include down the chimney, through openings around the chimney, through vents or openings behind shutters, under doors, siding, eaves or shingles.

Wildlife rabies cases, primarily in bats, raccoons, skunks and foxes, have been identified in the U.S., and these result in human and animal exposures requiring thousands of human rabies post-exposure treatments and animal euthanasia or quarantines.

Once clinical symptoms are present, there is no known medical cure for rabies. Symptoms include strange sensations at the site of the bite from a rabid animal, hallucinations and fear of water, all of which are quickly followed by death.

While rabies in humans is rare in the U.S. (usually only one or two human cases per year), the most common source of human rabies in the U.S. is from bats. Among the 19 naturally acquired cases of rabies in humans in the U.S. from 1997-2006, 17 were associated with bats. Among these, 14 patients had known encounters with bats. The

last case of human rabies in Kentucky from a bat was in 1996. Rabies can be prevented by avoiding contact with bats and getting immediate treatment if you do come in contact with a bat that tests positive or isn't able to be tested.

Points to remember to prevent rabies:

1. Do not touch a bat!
2. Teach your children: Do not touch a bat!
3. Keep your pets vaccinated.
4. Do not interact or attract wildlife.
5. Do not put food outside for wildlife and keep pet food covered.
6. Talk to your healthcare provider about preventive shots if you believe you have been exposed to rabies.

For more information on bats and the potential to contract rabies visit:

<https://www.cdc.gov/rabies/bats/education/index.html>

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The Cabinet for Health and Family Services is home to most of the state's human services and healthcare programs, including the Department for Medicaid Services, the Department for Community Based Services the Department for Public Health, the Department for Aging and Independent Living and the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities. CHFS is one of the largest agencies in state government, with nearly 8,000 full- and part-time employees located across the Commonwealth focused on improving the lives and health of Kentuckians.