



STATE OF MICHIGAN

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 23, 2019

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Spring is here and wildlife are active: Be aware of rabies in Michigan

LANSING, Mich. – Warmer weather creates additional opportunities for outdoor activities in Michigan and increases the chances of wildlife encounters. Michiganders are reminded to adopt practices that protect their families and animals from rabies.

Rabies is a viral disease of mammals that is transmitted through the bite or scratch of an infected animal. Bats and skunks are the most common carriers of rabies in Michigan. In 2018, there were 79 cases of rabies in animals in the state, including 77 bats and two skunks.

Rabies testing at the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) is ramping up, and as of May 22, the MDHHS Bureau of Laboratories has identified rabies in five bats and two skunks of 928 animals tested.

Michigan health departments experience increased calls from citizens about bat encounters during the warm weather months between May and September. During this time, bats are more active, searching for food and rearing their young. While bats are beneficial to our ecosystem, they are also one of the species that is a natural host for the rabies virus.

People or pets usually get exposed to rabies when they are bitten by an infected animal. Other situations that may present a risk are when a bat is found in a room with people who have been asleep, or a bat is found with an unattended child or an impaired adult who cannot be sure they didn't have contact with the bat. In these cases, it is important to collect the bat for rabies testing.

Rabies is fatal to humans. Postexposure treatment is given to people who are exposed to a potentially rabid animal. Treatment is not necessary if the animal tests negative for rabies.

Protect your family and pets from rabies by taking these simple steps:

- Avoid contact with wildlife. Do not keep wild animals as pets and do not try to rehabilitate wildlife yourself. Wild animals can carry rabies without looking sick.
- If a wild animal appears sick, please report it to the Department of Natural Resources online [at Michigan.gov/eyesinthefield](http://Michigan.gov/eyesinthefield) or at 517-336-5030.

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- If you are bitten or scratched by an animal, seek immediate medical attention and alert the local health department. A directory of local public health departments is available at Malph.org.
- If you find a bat in your home, safely confine or collect the bat if possible and contact your local health department to determine if it should be tested for rabies. More information on how to collect a bat safely can be found on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website.
- If you are unable or would prefer not to confine or collect a bat yourself, you may consider hiring a bat/wildlife removal service.
- Protect your pets by getting them vaccinated against rabies. Even cats that live indoors and never go outside need to be vaccinated, as they can encounter a bat that gets inside the home.
- If your animal is bitten or scratched by a wild animal or if you believe they have had unsupervised contact with wildlife, contact your veterinarian as soon as possible. Even if your pet is currently vaccinated against rabies, additional actions may need to be taken to prevent them from becoming infected. If possible, safely confine or capture the wild animal without touching it and contact your local animal control officer or veterinarian, as the animal may need to be tested for rabies.

More information about rabies and a map of rabies positive animals in Michigan can be found at Michigan.gov/rabies.

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