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Mid-Michigan District Health Department
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Spring has arrived, and soon the bats will too

Ithaca, Stanton, St. Johns - Warmer temperatures and sunny skies certainly are a welcome change after this year's brutal winter. Trees are budding, flowers are blooming, and people and animals alike are emerging from their winter slumber... including bats.

Some say bats get a bad rap, and while they do help reduce the mosquito population, they are also the most common animal in Michigan to transmit rabies, so for that reason, we are wise to be cautious.

Rabies is always fatal if left untreated, according to Dr. Robert Graham, Medical Director for the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD). Therefore, he advises anyone who has been bitten by a bat seek medical attention right away. He would also like residents to be aware that bats have small teeth which may leave marks not easily seen, and that there are situations in which you should take action, even without an obvious bite wound. According to Graham, if a bat is found in the room of a sleeping person, in the room of an unattended child, or near a mentally impaired or intoxicated person, it should be treated as though a bite occurred, and you should take the following actions:

- Capture the bat: Most people do not realize that in order to be tested for rabies, a bat's head must be kept intact, so hitting it with any type of object, such as a tennis racket, is not advised. The first step in safely capturing a bat is to make sure not to touch it with your bare skin (leather work gloves are ideal). Have a small box or coffee can, a piece of cardboard and tape ready. When the bat lands, approach it slowly. Place the box or coffee can over the bat and then slide the cardboard under the container to trap the bat inside. Tape the cardboard securely to the container and contact the health department at 989-227-3111 in Clinton County, 989-875-1019 in Gratiot County, or 989-831-3615 in Montcalm County for euthanizing instructions and to discuss testing and treatment options. To see a video demonstration on safe bat capture, visit www.mmdhd.org (click on "community health" and then on "communicable disease").
- Notify MMDHD or your local health department right away, as the bat may need to be tested for rabies. The health department will tell you what further action, if any, needs to be taken.

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2- Bats and rabies

It is important to note that:

- Bats should not be placed in the freezer.
- Residents who have captured a bat are asked to call the health department at 989-227-3111 in Clinton County, 989-875-1019 in Gratiot County or 989-831-3615 to determine if it needs to be tested.
- Residents should not bring a bat to the health department without calling first.

Residents are also advised to bat-proof their homes by making sure to replace any loose soffits, flashings, eaves and siding. Be sure to cover roof vents with screens, make sure all doors shut tightly with no gaps, and that window screens are not damaged or torn.

Skunks, raccoons, foxes, and unvaccinated cats and dogs are also likely rabies carriers. To help protect yourself and loved ones from rabies, avoid approaching or touching any wild or stray animal. And remember, if you are bitten by a bat or other wild or stray animal, contact your health care provider immediately for treatment.

Mid-Michigan District Health Department serves the residents of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm Counties.

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