



## MID-MICHIGAN DISTRICT HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Your public health team, connecting with our communities to achieve healthier outcomes

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### **When it comes to bats, be cautious**

Ithaca, Stanton, St. Johns~ There's no denying that bats are creepy critters. One glimpse of them darting across the nighttime sky is enough to send chills up and down your spine and make you run for cover.

Maybe people are naturally prone to fear bats, or maybe they've been featured in one too many horror movies. Whatever the reason, bats certainly have a bad reputation. But is the bad rap warranted? Contrary to what many may think, bats are useful by helping to control the population of one of summer's most dreaded insects: pesky mosquitoes. Like most animals, bats would much rather stay away from people, but they do sometimes find their way into our homes, and that's when we need to be cautious.

Bats are among the most common animals in Michigan to transmit rabies, a disease that is fatal if untreated, so while fear isn't warranted, caution is. First and foremost, if you are bitten by a bat, seek medical attention right away. If a bite does occur; or if a bat has been found in the room of a sleeping person, in the room of an unattended child, or near a mentally impaired or intoxicated person, it may need to be tested for rabies. In order to be tested, a bat's head must be kept intact, so hitting it with any type of object, like a tennis racket, is not advised.

Capturing a bat isn't as difficult as you may think. The first step 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 slide the cardboard under the container to trap the bat inside. Tape the cardboard securely to the container. To see a video demonstration on safe bat capture, visit [www.mmdhd.org](http://www.mmdhd.org).

Once you have captured the bat, 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 further instructions and to find out if the bat needs to be tested. Please, do not bring a bat to the health department without calling first.

Be sure to bat-proof your home by replacing any loose soffits, flashings, eaves and siding. Also, cover roof vents with screens, make sure all doors shut tightly with no gaps, and that window screens are not damaged or torn.

Bats, skunks, raccoons, foxes, and unvaccinated cats and dogs are all 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.

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

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