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Fall Temperatures Increase Your Chance of Rabies Exposure

Eau Claire, Wisconsin – September 28th, 2017 – As temperatures drop, bats and other animals often look for a new home indoors. For this reason, the Health Department encourages you to take steps to reduce your chance of getting rabies. Wisconsin is home to at least eight bat species, and some make their homes where we live. This increases the chance for accidental contact with people, and between bats and other animals.



“Even if your pet is primarily kept ‘indoors’, there is still a risk of them being bitten by rabid animals as they are finding a new home indoors for the winter,” says Sue Arndt, Rabies Program Manager at the Eau Claire City-County Health Department. To keep your whole family safe and healthy, talk with your veterinarian to make sure your pets are up-to-date on their rabies vaccine. The vaccine will keep them from getting rabies from rabid animals, and spreading it to your family.

Historically, skunks have been the most common animal infected by rabies. But for the past decade, the number of rabid bats in Wisconsin has been higher. In fact, the last four cases of human rabies in Wisconsin all got the disease from bats (in years 1959, 2000, 2004, and 2010). With appropriate medical care, rabies is a 100% preventable human disease.

In addition to avoiding contact with bats, the Health Department recommends the following steps to lower your chance of getting rabies:

- Vaccinate dogs, cats, ferrets and livestock against rabies.
- Keep your pets on a leash when outdoors.
- Contact local associations if help is needed to shelter and find homes for stray dogs and cats.
- Stay away from all wild animals.
- Teach children not to go near any animals they don’t know. “Love your own, leave others alone.”
- Do not keep exotic or wild animals as pets.
- Keep screens in good repair and close any small opening where bats could enter.
- People traveling to developing counties where rabies is very common, or who are at ongoing risk of possible rabies exposure, such as veterinarians and animal control officers, should ask their doctor about receiving pre-exposure rabies vaccinations.

People who have had physical contact with a bat or other wild animal, even without a known bite, should immediately contact their physician. They should also report the incident to the Health Department at (715) 839-4718. The Health Department can determine if a bat or other animal has rabies, and if the person needs to get the rabies vaccinations.

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