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Fall Temperatures Increase Chance of Rabies Exposure for your Family & Pets

Eau Claire, WI – September 27, 2019 – As temperatures drop, bats and other animals often look for a new home indoors. This increases the chance for bats to have accidental contact with our family members and household pets (even our mostly “indoor” pets).

“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,” says Savannah Bergman, Rabies Program Manager at the Health Department. “The vaccine will keep them from getting rabies from rabid animals and spreading it to your family.”

In Wisconsin, skunks and bats are by far the most likely animals to carry the rabies virus. Bats don’t show signs of rabies; it’s impossible to tell if they carry the virus without laboratory testing. It’s possible to get rabies even when you don’t see any bite marks from the animal. Bat bites or scratches may be so small that you don’t even notice them. Rabies exposure is almost always through a bite, but rabies can also be transmitted if a rabid animal scratches a person or if its saliva is exposed to open skin.

The Health Department recommends the following steps to lower your chance of getting rabies:

- **Avoid contact with bats and all wild animals.**
- 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.
- Teach children not to go near any animals they don’t know. *“Love your own, leave others alone.”*
- Don’t keep exotic or wild animals as pets.
- Keep screens in good shape and close any small openings where bats could enter.
- People traveling to developing counties where rabies is 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.

If you, your family or your pets are exposed to a bat or wild animal, call your doctor right away. Also report the incident to the Health Department laboratory at 715-839-4718.



What’s an exposure to rabies?



Exposure to rabies:

- A bite from any animal, including wild, stray or domestic pet.
- Saliva or brain tissue from an animal that gets into a scratch, wound, or mucous membrane (example: nose, eyes).



Possible exposure to rabies:

- A bat in the room with an unattended child, mentally impaired person, intoxicated person, or anyone who’s been sleeping.
- A bat in firewood hand-carried into the home.



Not an exposure to rabies:

- A bat flying nearby.
- A bat seen in your attic or in a cave.

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