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**HEALTH
DEPARTMENT**
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Two bats confirmed infected with rabies in Northern Michigan

Two bats were confirmed to have been infected with rabies in Northern Michigan this week, prompting public health officials to remind residents and visitors to reduce their exposure to rabies. The infected bats were in Alpena County and Antrim County.

Rabies vaccine prevents rabies from developing in people who have been exposed to an infected animal. Once rabies symptoms begin, there is no treatment and it is always fatal.

Exposure to rabies is not an emergency, but decisions must not be delayed. According to Joshua Meyerson, MD, Medical Director for the Health Department of Northwest Michigan, if you are bitten or clawed by an animal, you should wash the area thoroughly and contact your health care provider immediately if treatment is needed. Next, call your local Health Department office to determine the need for rabies vaccination.

“Before we recommend rabies vaccine, we’ll review the type of your exposure, the animal you were exposed to, as well as laboratory and surveillance information for the area where the exposure occurred,” he said.

Raccoons, skunks, and bats are most often tested for rabies, and bats are responsible for most rabies exposure. Squirrels do not cause rabies among humans. Bites from squirrels, chipmunks, mice, and other small mammals are usually not considered a risk of rabies.

The US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) & Prevention defines an exposure to rabies as an animal bite penetrating skin, contact with an animal’s saliva or nervous system tissue, or contamination of open wounds, scrapes, and mucous membranes such as mouth or eyes.

“Bites and scratches from small animals like bats can be difficult to detect,” said Meyerson. “If there is a bat in a room with an unattended child, or someone who’s been sleeping or intoxicated, it’s sometimes hard for them to tell if they’ve been bitten or not.”

“Make every effort to capture the bat in a container and call us to have it tested,” he said. “If we can test it, we can determine if treatment is warranted. Without the bat, we have to assume it had rabies—and treatment is crucial to avoid developing the disease. Only one person is on record of surviving rabies.” Treatment for rabies consists of four anti-rabies shots over 14 days.

The best way to prevent rabies is to avoid contact with potentially infected animals. Parents should advise children not to pet or touch wild animals. Never approach or handle any animal that looks or acts ill, or behaves strangely. In addition, vaccinate your pets against rabies.

The CDC recommends the following steps to avoid exposure to animals infected with rabies:

- Vaccinate all pet dogs, cats, ferrets, and other animals that have frequent contact with humans. Consider vaccinating horses and other livestock.

The Health Department of Northwest Michigan is mandated by the Michigan Public Health Code to promote wellness, prevent disease, provide quality healthcare, address health problems of vulnerable populations, and protect the environment for the residents and visitors of Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Otsego Counties.

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