

## NEWS RELEASE

### Public Health - Madison & Dane County

#### Avoiding Problems with Bats

#### Bats are Vital to our Ecosystem but Risky Inside our Homes

Madison WI – August 14, 2013 - While there are countless cute kitten videos on YouTube, you probably won't find many cute bat videos. Most people don't find bats all that attractive, except for biologists or ecologists. These scientists will correctly point out that bats are a vital part of our natural ecosystem. One nursing mother bat can eat more than her body weight's worth of insects every night - which can add up to as many as 4,500 bugs, including mosquitoes.

The problem we have with bats is when they show up in our living space. Late summer is when these unwanted contacts become a bigger problem because the young bats born in the spring are now old enough to take to the air in search of food and new places to live.

Finding a live or even a dead bat in your bedroom can be an upsetting experience. It can also present a serious risk to your health because bats can be infected with rabies. In Wisconsin, they are the main carriers of that disease, although since May 1, 2013, two bats have tested positive for rabies in Dane County and twelve have tested positive state-wide. Even though a very small percentage of bats actually carry rabies, the risk of exposure is more significant because rabies is almost always fatal if nothing is done. You should assume potential exposure to rabies if a bat is found in a room where anyone has been sleeping. Potential exposure should also be assumed if an unattended child, a mentally disabled person, someone under the influence of drugs or alcohol or a pet has spent time in a room where a bat has been found.

The normal gut reaction for most people finding a bat inside is to shoo it out of the house or kill it and throw it away. **This is actually the worst thing you can do.** Having the bat available for lab testing will confirm whether or not the animal was infected. If the lab results are negative, you have not been exposed. If the results are positive, or if the bat was not available for testing, it must be assumed that you have been exposed to rabies. Even though the chances are small that you were actually exposed, because rabies is fatal, getting the rabies vaccine is the only way to make sure that you are protected.

Dogs and especially cats like to catch bats during the night. If this happens, again it is very important to not dispose of the bat. This also makes it especially important to make sure that your pets have up-to-date rabies vaccinations. If you believe that your pet has been exposed to a bat, call Animal Services (at the number below) and/or your vet.

Another pet-related issue is that many cat owners with indoor cats don't bother to vaccinate their cats against rabies because they don't go outside. This decision becomes a problem when a bat works its way into your house, and your nocturnal kitty is able to catch and eat the bat while you are sleeping. This possibility should provide you with high motivation to vaccinate your kitty.

#### SOME FINAL ADVICE ON SAFELY CATCHING A BAT IN YOUR HOUSE

Be extremely careful when attempting to catch the bat to avoid being bitten. The most common method of capture is to wait until the bat lands on a wall or other surface, place an empty cottage cheese or other container over it, slide the cover under and secure it. Some people use a broom or tennis racket to knock the bat out of the air and then capture it.

- Once safely captured keep the bat in the room with the doors and windows closed. Don't set it free.
- If you must kill the bat, don't damage the head since the brain needs to be intact for proper testing.
- Call Public Health—Animal Services at (608) 255-2345. They can help capture the bat and/or pick up the bat and transport it to the lab.
- If the test results are negative, it means that you were not exposed to rabies at the time of the incident.
- If the test results are positive or uncertain, you need to be vaccinated as soon as possible.

If a bat is found or captured during the nighttime hours, we recommend that the bat be kept refrigerated since heat and time will break down the brain tissue needed for proper testing. Animal Services can pick it up the next day.

More detailed information can be found at:

[www.publichealthmdc.com/environmental/animal/rabies.cfm](http://www.publichealthmdc.com/environmental/animal/rabies.cfm)

and at

[www.cdc.gov/rabies/bats/education/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/bats/education/index.html)

For information on the importance of bat conservation, see [www.batcow.org/](http://www.batcow.org/).