

CITY OF BALTIMORE

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Bat Complaints On The Rise In Baltimore City

BALTIMORE, MD (August 28, 2009) – The Baltimore City Health Department is reporting a large increase in residential bat complaints this summer. Animal Control has received more than 100 calls, and 60 bats have been captured and taken for testing. Bats can carry and can transmit rabies, a viral disease that affects the central nervous system of mammals and is almost always fatal.

Rabies is a virus found in the saliva of rabid animals and is usually transmitted through bites. In Maryland, rabies is most commonly found in wild animals such as raccoons, foxes or bats.

Bats have small, sharp teeth that may not leave visible puncture wounds or cause noticeable pain. The Baltimore City Health Department advises city residents to not touch or pet stray animals or unfamiliar animals. If you are bitten, scratched or have contact with an animal you believe to be rabid, immediately wash the wound, seek medical attention, and report the incident to the Bureau of Animal Control by calling the city's 3-1-1 service line.

Human rabies cases remain extremely rare: the last case in Maryland was in 1976. A few people die of rabies each year in the United States. Rabies is preventable when medical care is obtained shortly after exposure. However, once clinical symptoms develop, rabies is nearly always fatal.

Several types of bats indigenous to Maryland are considered endangered species and should not be harmed, if possible. Bats feed on insects at night and keep the mosquito population in check, helping to reduce the spread of West Nile virus and other diseases. Baltimore City Health Department Exotic Pet regulations prohibit keeping bats as pets.

Take Steps to Prevent Infection

- If a pet has been in a fight with another animal, wear gloves while handling it. Keep it away from people and other animals and call a veterinarian or 3-1-1, the city service line, to report the potential animal exposure.
- Use metal garbage cans with secure lids to keep raccoons and other animals from scavenging.
- Seal any openings through which bats and other animals could enter a home, such as chimneys, basements, porch holes and dryer vents. Use window screens and make sure they are intact.

- If a wild animal is caught indoors, attempt to confine it without handling it and call the city service line, 3-1-1.
- Avoid contact with stray, wild, or unfamiliar animals.
- Learn to recognize the signs that may indicate an animal is rabid:
 - Bats that are seen during the day or that cannot fly could be rabid.
 - A rabid animal can become either unnaturally approachable or withdrawn, as well as overly excited, irritable, or aggressive.
 - Convulsions or frothing at the mouth are possible indications of infection.

In addition, residents are advised to keep their pet's rabies vaccinations up-to-date. Those who have not had their dogs, cats or domesticated ferrets vaccinated are encouraged to make an appointment with a veterinarian or visit the monthly rabies clinic held at the Baltimore Animal Rescue and Care Shelter (BARCS), which is normally held the first Saturday of the month from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. with some exceptions. Please call ahead to verify at 410-396-4695. For more information, visit www.baltimorehealth.org.

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