



BCHD PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

HEALTH DEPARTMENT SEES LARGE INCREASE IN BATS CAPTURED IN BALTIMORE CITY HOMES Residents are encouraged to get pets vaccinated for rabies

BALTIMORE, MD (August 18, 2011) – The Baltimore City Health Department is reporting a large increase in rabid bats this summer. Through Aug. 12th, Animal Control has captured 183 bats, 12 of which have tested positive for rabies. For all of 2010, 222 bats were seized, 11 of which were rabid.

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, skunks or bats. Rabies affects the central nervous system of mammals and is almost always fatal.

Bats have small, sharp teeth that may not leave visible puncture wounds or cause noticeable pain. The Baltimore City Health Department advises 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 Animal Control Program by calling the Baltimore City's 311 customer service telephone line.

“Rabies is preventable when medical care is obtained shortly after exposure. Once clinical symptoms develop, however, rabies is nearly always fatal,” said Commissioner of Health Dr. Oxiris Barbot.

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.

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 or is bleeding, wear gloves while handling it. Keep it away from people and other animals and call a veterinarian or 311, 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 immediately call the city service line, 311. City operators will put you in touch with personnel from the Health Department who can determine whether or not rabies prophylaxis is appropriate.
- Avoid contact with stray, wild, or unfamiliar animals.
- Learn to recognize the signs that may indicate an animal is rabid:
 - o Bats that are seen during the day or that cannot fly could be rabid.
 - o A rabid animal can become either unnaturally approachable or withdrawn, as well as overly excited, irritable, or aggressive.
 - o Convulsions or frothing at the mouth are possible indications of infection.

In addition, residents are advised to get their pets vaccinated regularly. Vaccinate your dogs, cats or domesticated ferrets by making an appointment with a veterinarian or visiting 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 noon. Please call ahead to verify at 410-396-4695.

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