



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**HEALTH DEPARTMENT ADVISES RESIDENTS ABOUT THE RISK OF RABIES  
2008 is on Pace to Overtake 2007 for Positive Cases**

YPSILANTI, Mich., June 20, 2008 — Washtenaw County Public Health Officials are reporting two bats have tested positive for rabies. The Michigan Department of Community Health is also reporting an increase of positive cases statewide, with a total of 27 as of June 18<sup>th</sup>. The State breakdown includes 6 skunks, 19 bats, and 2 foxes. Totals for 2007, which turned out to be a record year for rabies, showed an increase in animals testing positive for rabies both in Washtenaw County and statewide and if these trends continue 2008 might be another record breaker. “In a typical year we have approximately 50 rabies cases statewide. We’re not sure why we’ve seen such a sharp rise in rabies over the past few years and we’re concerned about the cases we’ve seen this early in the season.” said Donna Nussdorfer, Communicable Disease Program Coordinator for the Washtenaw County Public Health Department.

A higher number of rabies cases are usually reported in the late spring, summer, and early fall months as animals, both wild and domestic, are more active during these seasons. Humans are also more active, venturing outdoors more often in the warmer months. Bats, which have the highest number of reported rabies cases, migrate to Michigan in the late summer and early fall.

Bats are able to squeeze through narrow slits, cracks, and holes the size of a dime, although they often enter homes through open windows or unscreened fireplaces. Bats also commonly enter buildings through openings associated with the roof edge and valleys, eaves, apex of the gable, attic or roof vents, dormers, and siding. Other openings may be found

under loose fitting doors, around windows, gaps around various conduits (wiring, plumbing, air conditioning) that pass through walls, and through utility vents. Closing, sealing, or screening these openings will deter bats from entering a building.

**Health Department officials advise residents to take the following precautions to protect themselves, their family members, and their animals from rabies:**

- Attempt to test any bat you find in your room upon waking, a bat found in the room of an unattended child, or near a mentally impaired or intoxicated person.
- Prevent bats from entering homes or other buildings where they might come in contact with humans or animals.
- Never handle unfamiliar wild or domestic animals, even if they appear friendly.
- Wash any wound caused by an animal thoroughly with soap and water and seek immediate medical attention.
- Test all wild or stray animals (excluding rodents) that may have exposed humans or other animals to rabies.
- Don't leave pet food or table scraps outside where they will attract wild or stray animals.
- Keep vaccinations current for all dogs, cats, and ferrets. Additionally, keep your cats and ferrets inside, and your dogs under direct supervision.
- Consult your veterinarian about vaccinations for horses and other livestock.
- Call animal control to remove stray animals from your neighborhood, and call nuisance animal control to deal with wild animals.

**What Is Rabies?** —Rabies is a viral disease that is usually transmitted animal-to-animal, but can also infect humans as a result of an animal bite. Animal bites should always be reviewed carefully to determine if the animal may have rabies. Prompt treatment of the person can prevent the development of rabies, but if symptoms develop, the disease is almost always fatal.

**How Is It Spread?** —The rabies virus is found in the saliva of an infected animal. The virus is spread through a bite or scratch from an infected animal or through contact with intact mucous membranes. Animals most affected are wild animals such as skunks, raccoons, foxes, wolves, coyotes, and bats. Domestic animals (usually unvaccinated cats, dogs, and horses) can also spread the virus. Animals not considered likely to carry rabies include chipmunks, gerbils, hamsters, guinea pigs, gophers, moles, mice, muskrats, prairie dogs, rabbits, rats, shrews, squirrels, and voles.

**Symptoms of a Rabid Animal** —Foaming at the mouth and erratic behavior are two of the most widely know rabies symptoms. However, there are actually two categories of behavior that rabies produce: “dumb” and “furious” rabies.

#### **Dumb Rabies**

- Animals may become depressed and retreat to isolated places.
- Wild animals may lose their fear of humans.
- Animals may exhibit signs of paralysis, such as a drooping head, paralyzed hind limbs, abnormal facial expressions, and a sagging lower jaw.

## **Furious Rabies**

- Animals may show extreme excitement and aggression such as attacking stationary objects or other animals.
- Gnawing and biting their own limbs.

The Washtenaw County Public Health Department is available to consult regarding the need for post-exposure prophylaxis. We also coordinate testing for rabies. Contact the Health Department at (734) 544-6770.

Additional rabies information is available at:

Washtenaw County Public Health

[http://www.ewashtenaw.org/government/departments/public\\_health/bitesrabies](http://www.ewashtenaw.org/government/departments/public_health/bitesrabies)

(734) 544-6700

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

<http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/>

Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH)

<http://www.michigan.gov/emergingdiseases/0,1607,7-186-25807---,00.html>

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