

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Rabies Shots for Pets, Cautious Approach with Bats Urged by  
Department of Community Health and the Environment**  
*Five St. Charles County Bats Were Found with Rabies in 2000*

*St. Charles County* — Spring is upon us with open windows and doors and outdoor activity on the increase. This is also the time when bats become active after the cold winter months. Due to these inevitable events, the St. Charles County Department of Community Health and the Environment urges residents to make sure their pets have received a current rabies vaccination and take reasonable precautions to avoid human contact with bats.

A review of the impact of rabies during 2000 shows that Missouri had 50 cases of animal rabies confirmed by laboratory examination. Bats represented 44 of those cases. Five bats were reported from St. Charles County, one from Warren County, 15 from St. Louis County, five from St. Louis City, and two from Jefferson County during that time. Due to presence of bats in our area, the Department of Community Health and the environment wants residents to be aware of the appropriate way to react when a bat is present or a family pet comes in contact with a bat.

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According to Gil Copley, Director of Community Health and Environment, "Sick bats are not aggressive but become too sick to fly and are often found on the ground. This poses a risk to curious pets that may sniff or mouth or even pick up rabies infected bats. A current rabies vaccination will protect the pet."

Humans are also at risk for exposure if they are curious and pick up the sick creature. If a bat is handled, it should be captured with the assistance of an animal control officer. The bat can be covered with a box, container, or an old blanket to trap it until the animal control officer can respond. Anyone who handles a bat should thoroughly wash any part of the body that contacted the bat with soap and warm water as well as any known bite or scratch. Immediate medical guidance should always be the next step. The bat, if captured, will be sent to the State of Missouri Public Health Laboratory to be tested for the rabies virus. If the handled bat is not captured, a preventive series of vaccinations may be necessary.

A bat should also be captured if the animal is found inside the home and occupants cannot rule out the possibility of exposure defined as touching or being touched by the animal or the possibility that the bat was present while occupants slept. The above recommendations are from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta, Georgia.

The CDC states that "although people usually know when they have been bitten by a bat, because bats have small teeth which may leave marks that are not easily seen, sometimes there are situations in which people should seek medical advice even in the absence of an obvious bite wound." For example, if you awaken and find a bat in your room, see a bat in the room of an unattended child, or see a bat near a mentally impaired or intoxicated person, exposure cannot be

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ruled out. Immediate medical advice should be sought and the bat should be captured and tested for rabies. Having a bat on a front porch, under the eaves of a house, or in an attic is not considered exposure since there is no opportunity for exposure of occupants. However, bats should always be prevented from entering a home.”

To further explain the possible results of exposure to rabid animals, you must understand what rabies is and how people get it. According to the CDC, "rabies is an infectious viral disease that affects the nervous system of humans and other mammals. People get rabies from the bite of an animal with rabies (a rabid animal). Any wild mammal, such as a raccoon, skunk, fox, coyote, or bat, can have rabies and transmit it to humans. Although rare, it is also possible that people may get rabies if infectious material from a rabid animal, such as saliva, gets directly into their eyes, nose, mouth, or a wound. In some foreign countries with poor or non-existent rabies control programs, people may also be exposed to domestic dogs and cats infected with the virus.”

The CDC also states that “because rabies is a fatal disease, the goal of public health officials is first, to prevent human exposure to rabies by education and second, to prevent the disease with anti-rabies treatment if exposure occurs. Tens of thousands of people are successfully treated each year after being bitten by an animal that may have rabies. A few people die of rabies each year in the United States, usually because they do not recognize the risk of rabies from the bite of a wild animal and do not seek medical advice.”

If a bite is left untreated and human rabies disease develops, it is fatal. Most cases of human rabies identified in the U.S. in the last 10 years were caused by exposure to bats. The

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presence of rabies can be confirmed by advanced laboratory techniques, even when it is not known how the victim was exposed. Alarmingly, in only one of those bat-acquired cases was an obvious bite injury found.

For tips on "bat-proofing" your home or information on how to respond to the presence of a bat, contact the animal control agency in your area or go to the websites listed below. Animal control programs in St. Charles County can be reached at the following numbers:

- 636-949-7387 St. Charles County Division of Humane Services  
636-949-0809 County Sheriff's Department after hours
- 636-949-2295 St. Charles City Animal Control  
636-949-3300 St. Charles City Police Department after hours
- 636-949-7354 St. Peters Animal Control  
636-278-2222 St. Peters Police Department after hours
- 636-240-3200 (all hours) O'Fallon Animal Control
- 636-327-5105 (all hours) Wentzville Animal Control

For further information on bats and rabies, citizens can visit the CDC Rabies Program web page at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/rabies> or go to the St. Charles County Department of Community Health and the Environment website at [www.scchealth.org](http://www.scchealth.org) and select the rotating banner to go to the CDC Program.