

Knox Public Health

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**For Immediate Release
Aug 17, 2020**

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Woman bitten by rabid bat

Knox Public Health has confirmed that a bat which bit the woman who found it, was rabid. This is the third case of rabies this year, each involving bats. The bat was found when the woman was cleaning a cabin in Jefferson Township, north of Danville. She was bitten when she attempted to pick it up without wearing gloves.

The bat was successfully captured and brought to the health department for testing. The woman, who is not a Knox County resident, is currently undergoing postexposure prophylaxis. Prompt post exposure treatment is crucial; once a person shows symptoms of rabies, the fatality rate is almost 100 percent.

“It is important to try to capture a bat that has come in contact or is suspected of contact with a human being or a pet,” said Director of Environmental Health Nate Overholt, R.S. “However, it’s especially important to protect yourself when attempting to capture the bat, specifically by wearing leather gloves. Never grab a bat with your bare hands.” Once the bat is captured, it can be tested for rabies and the need for treatment determined if it came in contact with someone.”

There is no charge to submit a bat for rabies testing. The health department is open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. If the bat is caught on the weekend, Overholt advises putting it in a container and keeping it in a cool location until it can be brought to the health department. Or contact law enforcement which can contact Knox Public Health to come pick up the bat.

To catch a bat, you will need leather work gloves, a small box or coffee can, a piece of cardboard and tape. When the bat lands, approach it slowly, while wearing the gloves, and place the box or coffee can over it. Slide the cardboard under the container to trap the bat inside. Secure the lid with tape. If the bat is alive, be sure to punch small air holes in the lid. Be carefully not to shake or otherwise traumatize the bat as this can damage the brain, rendering it untestable for rabies. If the bat is dead, keep it cool but avoid freezing it.

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Locally, it is unusual to have three positive rabies cases in a year. In Knox County, there have been only two confirmed cases in the past five years. So far this year, the rabid animals have been found in Gambier, Howard and Danville. Overholt cited no specific reason for the increase in rabies cases, but stressed the importance of having pets vaccinated due the likelihood of a pet coming in contact with a rabid animal.

Bats are just one of the common carriers of rabies. Other animals that can have rabies and transmit it to humans and pets are raccoons, foxes, skunks and coyotes.

You can't tell if an animal has rabies by just looking at it. One clue is if the animal is acting strangely or is not in its natural habitat. "Some animals may be hostile and try to bite you. Some animals may act timid or shy when they have rabies. This is the most common kind," said Overholt. "A wild animal might move slowly or act tame. You might be able to easily get close to it. Since that's not the way wild animals usually act, you should remember that something could be wrong."

The only way doctors can know for sure if an animal has rabies is to do a laboratory test which involves sampling brain tissues. The animal has to be euthanized to be tested, hence the importance of having pets vaccinated. This includes indoor-only cats, who can often be exposed to bats that make their way inside the home.

For more information on rabies, check the Knox Public Health website at www.knoxhealth.com, or contact Overholt at the health department at 392-2200, Ext. 2228 or noverholt@knoxhealth.com.

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