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It's Autumn - Time to Check for Bats Around Your Home

Recently, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) reported the first human case of rabies caused by a bat in Illinois since 1954. The incident, although rare, points up the need for Kane County residents to check for bats around their houses. Autumn is a time when bats are more prevalent in the community.

In Illinois, rabies is found in bats more than any other wildlife species. Typically, less than 5 percent of bats tested for rabies are found to be rabid. Wildlife experts say that if you find a bat in your home, it should not be touched, and if possible, confined in one room.

Kane County Animal Control (KCAC) works with IDPH for testing of rabies in bats. KCAC will remove a bat from a citizen's home that meets the requirements set forth by the State of Illinois: if a bat is found near anyone sleeping, intoxicated, an infant, an animal or otherwise incapacitated person in the room where the bat was located. There is no exposure unless one is bitten by the bat or assumed exposure if you wake up to find the bat in a bedroom. Testing of the animal will determine if treatment is required. Exposure to rabies requires a series of vaccinations against rabies that can be costly.

KCAC will NOT remove a bat that has met the following criteria:

- Bats that have not exposed a person or owned animal will not be picked up or tested.
- Bats that are found outside the residence, in an attic or unused basement.

Rabies affects the brain and will cause unnatural behavior in mammals. Children especially should be reminded to avoid contact with wild animals that are acting unusual, such as a bat that is outside in the day time or one that cannot fly.

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According to the IDPH, exclusion remains the best way to prevent and control bats in a structure. Some bats, especially those in northern Illinois, leave their roosting places in September and early October to migrate south where they will overwinter in caves, rocky ledges and cliffs, and occasionally accessible walls and attics, where others hibernate throughout the winter season in Illinois. Potential entry points in structures are best sealed during the months of September through April. Bats are protected under the Illinois Wildlife Code. Homes colonized by bats must contact a nuisance trapper to have them removed. A list of wildlife control specialists, who may be familiar with bat exclusion procedures, can be obtained from the KCAC website at KaneCountyPets.com.

It is important to keep all pets—dogs, cats, ferrets, etc.—up-to-date with their rabies vaccinations. Not only does the vaccine protect the pet, it also serves as barrier of protection for people. Even indoor pets should be vaccinated, as illustrated by the fact that some of the bat cases are found indoors.

KCAC will host its final Rabies and Microchip Animal Clinic of the year on Saturday, October 2 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Kane County Animal Control, 4060 Keslinger Road in Geneva. For more information about rabies, see the KCAC website at KaneCountyPets.com/Rabies.aspx.

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