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PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

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Second Rabid Bat in Washington County – Actions needed to Prevent Rabies

In the past month, two bats from Washington County submitted for testing have been positive for rabies. Bat bites are barely noticeable. A conscious adult would usually know if a bat bites them. In addition, it is also considered an exposure if a bat flies into a person. Because bat teeth are so small, a bite from a bat may not leave a mark. If a person wakes up in a room and finds a bat present, this is considered a bat exposure. If a bat is found in a room with a previously unattended child, mentally disabled person, or intoxicated person, this is also considered an exposure. If possible, the bat should be captured without damaging the head by placing a coffee-can-sized container over the bat and sliding a piece of cardboard between the can and the surface the bat is on. Tape the cardboard onto the can to seal the bat inside. Try to capture the bat in your house. Do not just shoo the bat out the door.

Bats are submitted to the Wisconsin State Lab of Hygiene for rabies testing if there is a known or suspected human or pet exposure. If the bat is found to be rabid, a series of vaccinations is given to prevent the rabies from developing in the person that was exposed. Exposed pets are quarantined to prevent any further spread of rabies. The quarantine period for a pet with a current rabies vaccination is 60 days while the quarantine period for a pet that is not current on their rabies vaccination is 180 days.

According to Margaret Anderson, Washington County Environmental Health Specialist, "Rabies in humans and even in pets is rare but because rabies is most always a fatal disease, procedures must be followed. It is better to be safe than sorry when it comes to animal bites and exposures."

Steps to follow if you experience a possible exposure to rabies:

- Immediately clean all bite wounds thoroughly with warm water and soap

- ❑ Promptly seek medical attention for all bite wounds and to discuss, with your physician, the need for further follow-up to prevent rabies, tetanus, or other infection.
- ❑ Report all animal bites to the Washington County Sheriff's Department at 262-335-4411 to assure proper follow-up. Observation and/or testing of the biting animal can, in most cases, eliminate the need for rabies shots.
- ❑ If your pet comes in contact with a potentially rabid animal such as another person's pet, a bat or other wild animal, report the incident to your veterinarian
- ❑ The biting animal should be captured (if possible). When capturing the animal, try to avoid being bitten again or damaging the animal's head.
- ❑ If you have any questions about what to do, or if you are unsure of the risk posed by a bite, call the Washington County Health Department at 262-335-4462.

Anderson recommends taking these steps to reduce the chances of rabies exposure:

- ❑ Vaccination of pets is the first line of defense against the rabies virus. The law states that dogs must be vaccinated against rabies and licensed. Cats and ferrets can also be vaccinated against rabies and in some municipalities, it is the law.
- ❑ Keep dogs, cats and ferrets on a leash or under your control at all times. Allowing pets to roam can put them at risk of exposure to a rabid animal without your knowledge. Roaming animals could get into a situation where they may bite a person or another animal leaving you open to a rabies quarantine of your pet or a possible law suit.
- ❑ Do not approach or try to capture stray animals. Call your town constable or local law enforcement if stray or wild animals are a problem in your area. Teach children not to handle or go near unfamiliar or wild animals.
- ❑ Make your home bat-proof. Make sure windows are screened, chimneys are capped, attic vents are screened, attic doors have a draft guard below the door and that access openings are kept closed. Any opening on the outside of your home larger than a quarter-inch by a half-inch should be caulked or filled with stainless steel wool.

Rabies is a preventable disease. By following the steps stated above, you will be working in partnership with the Washington County Health Department to prevent a human rabies incident from occurring in our county.

Additional information on rabies is available at the website of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/rabies. You can find additional information about rabies as well as a copy of the Washington County Health Department's Animal Bite brochure, discussing "What to do if you are bitten or if your pet bites someone?" at www.co.washington.wi.us/chn or by calling 262-365-5878.

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