



# BERRIEN COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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**For Immediate Release**

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## **Berrien County Health Department Shares Resources for Bat Safety, Rabies Prevention**

**Benton Harbor, Michigan, Oct. 3, 2022** – As temperatures drop and bats look for warmer refuges, the Berrien County Health Department is sharing important safety information with community members to help prevent the spread of rabies.

Rabies is an acute, fatal disease that is spread to humans by exposure to animals infected with rabies. The virus is present in the saliva of an infected animal. It enters the body through a break in the skin caused by the teeth of a rabid animal or when scratches, abrasions or mucous membranes are contaminated with the saliva of an infected animal. In 2021, there were five rabies deaths in the U.S.

In [Michigan](#), most positive rabies cases are found in bats. Other wild animals most likely to carry or be infected with rabies in Michigan are skunks, foxes, raccoons and woodchucks.

If you are bitten by a bat, wake up to find a bat in your bedroom or find a bat in a room with a sleeping person, unattended child, person who is cognitively impaired or someone who is intoxicated, precautionary steps need to be taken to ensure a rabies infection does not occur. Bat bites are so small, a person may not always know if they've been bitten.

To determine if a bat has rabies and what medical attention might be needed, the animal should be captured alive and brought to Berrien County Animal Control which will coordinate with BCHD to send the bat off to be tested by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. The bat should be brought in alive to ensure proper testing can be done. If the bat dies, place it in a container and keep it in the fridge until you receive next steps from animal control. If the bat is not caught and tested, the exposed person will need to get the rabies vaccine series.

The rabies vaccine series consists of four injections administered over 14 days and is very costly, even with insurance. Capturing the bat and having it tested for the disease will help better determine the best course of treatment.

“Though rare in humans, rabies is a painful, fatal disease that is preventable if the right steps are taken,” said Elizabeth Sullivan, public health investigator at BCHD. “We’re hoping to educate the community on how to safely interact with bats and other wild animals so they can keep themselves and loved ones safe while limiting the need for an expensive, time-consuming and painful treatment course.”

To safely capture a bat, you will need gloves, a small container or coffee can, a piece of cardboard or thin plastic cutting board and tape. To catch the animal:

1. Put on gloves before attempting to capture the bat.
2. Wait for the bat to come to a rest.
3. Slowly approach and place a small container over the top of the bat.
4. Slide the cardboard or cutting board under the container, trapping the bat inside.
5. Once the bat is in the container, securely tape the container shut so it cannot escape.
6. Place a few very small holes, less than a quarter inch in size, in the container to keep the bat alive.
7. Contact Berrien County Animal Control at 269.927.5648 Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. to receive instructions on next steps. After hours, call Berrien County Dispatch’s non-emergency line at 269.983.3060.

The bat will be sent to MDHHS for testing, and the results will be available within five days. Once the results are received, the Health Department will work with you to determine necessary medical treatment.

You can prevent your risk of exposure to rabies by avoiding contact with wild animals. Never approach, touch or feed wild animals. If you store food outside, keep it in a sturdy container with tight fitting lid.

You can also make your home less accessible to wild animals by installing a chimney cap and sealing openings around your home such as attics, crawl spaces or areas under your porch or deck.

For more information on rabies and safely capturing bats, visit [bit.ly/BCHDRabiesPrevention](http://bit.ly/BCHDRabiesPrevention).

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