



STATE OF MARYLAND

# DHMH News Release

Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

Larry Hogan, Governor - Boyd Rutherford, Lt. Governor - Van T. Mitchell, Secretary

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

## **For 2nd year, the number of rabid bats in Maryland increases**

*10<sup>th</sup> annual World Rabies Day promotes prevention of potentially fatal disease*

**Baltimore, MD** (September 28, 2016) – For the second consecutive year, Maryland is experiencing an increase in the number of rabid bats. The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene is promoting the World Rabies Day theme of “Rabies: Educate. Vaccinate. Eliminate.” to increase awareness about the world’s most fatal disease and how to prevent it.

In Maryland, rabies is most often found in raccoons, skunks, foxes, cats, bats and groundhogs. Other mammals including dogs, ferrets and farm animals, can get rabies if they are not vaccinated. This year so far, there have been 100 confirmed rabid bats in the state.

“Rabies is a serious disease transmitted through the saliva of an infected animal, such as a bat. It is nearly always fatal without the provision of preventive treatment.” said Deputy Secretary for Public Health Services Dr. Howard Haft. “Residents who encounter sick, injured or nuisance wildlife should be sure to avoid contact with the animal and to report it by calling toll-free in Maryland: 1-877-463-6497.”

While they can be carriers of the rabies virus, bats play key roles in Maryland’s ecosystem. They eat insects, pollinate plants and scatter seeds. Only a small proportion of bats have rabies; however, most recent human cases of rabies in the United States have been caused by exposure to rabid bats. If someone encounters a bat in their house and there is the possibility that it bit someone, the bat should be collected safely and tested for rabies. To catch a bat safely, close the door to the room with the bat in it and call the local animal control agency or a private wildlife cooperator for help. If someone must catch the bat themselves, they should use caution and:

1. Close doors and windows.
2. Find a small container like a box or a large can, and a piece of cardboard large enough to cover the opening of the container. Punch small air holes in the cardboard.
3. Put on leather work gloves.
4. Wait for the bat to land. When the bat lands, approach it slowly and place the container over it. Slide the cardboard under the container to trap the bat inside.
5. Tape the cardboard to the container, securing the bat inside, and contact the city or county health department to have the bat tested for rabies.

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It is important to stay away from wild animals, including young animals and those that appear sick or injured. Animals with rabies might act normally during the early stages of the disease, making it difficult to know they are infected. As the disease progresses, animals often show changes in behavior: Wild animals might act very docile, and domestic animals might become aggressive. Rabid animals might stagger, drool or become paralyzed. Marylanders should report sick, injured or nuisance wildlife by calling toll-free in Maryland: 1-877-463-6497.

When a person is bitten by a rabid animal or is exposed to its saliva, onset of the disease is prevented by the provision of a rabies vaccine series administered in a 14-day period and a dose of rabies immunoglobulin given at the beginning of that series. Each year, approximately 900 Marylanders receive preventive treatment after exposure to (potentially) rabid animals.

To prevent exposure to rabies:

- Have your dogs, cats, ferrets, horses, sheep and cattle vaccinated against rabies.
- Keep your pet under your control at all times, especially when traveling.
- View wildlife from a distance and do not feed or attempt to rescue wildlife.
- Avoid sick animals and any that are acting in an unusual manner.
- Cover garbage cans securely and do not leave pet food outside.
- Do not “rescue” or relocate wildlife.
- Prevent bats from entering your home. If you find a bat in your home, do not touch it. Only let it go if you are sure no people or household pets have had any contact with it. Contact your local health department or animal control agency for assistance.
- If you or your pet has been bitten or otherwise exposed to a rabid or suspected rabid domestic animal, get the owner’s name, address and telephone number. Contact your local health department or animal control agency immediately.

Residents who need to report sick, injured or nuisance wildlife should contact the Maryland Department of Natural Resources at 410-260-8540 or 1-877-463-6497 for assistance; for after-hours wildlife emergencies, call 1-800-628-9944.

Additional information about rabies can be found on the Health and Mental Hygiene website at <http://goo.gl/rmD7WA>. For more DNR information about young wildlife, visit <http://goo.gl/3SzSzu>. Additional tips on reporting sick or injured wildlife also can be found at DNR at <http://goo.gl/xhY9tA>.

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*Marylanders who need help finding substance use treatment resources should visit <http://goo.gl/nIfGm0> or call the Maryland Crisis Hotline, which provides 24/7 support, at 1-800-422-0009. For information on many of the policies currently implemented to fight addiction and overdose in Maryland, see <http://goo.gl/KvEzOw>. If you know of someone in need of treatment for a substance use disorder, treatment facilities can be located by location and program characteristics on our page at <http://goo.gl/rbGF6S>.*

*The Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene is the state government agency that protects Maryland’s public health and also works to help Marylanders make better health decisions for better health outcomes. Stay connected: [www.twitter.com/MarylandDHMH](http://www.twitter.com/MarylandDHMH) and [www.facebook.com/MarylandDHMH](http://www.facebook.com/MarylandDHMH).*