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## Florida Department of Health in Bay County Reminds Residents and Visitors to Avoid Contact with Bats



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**Panama City, Fla.** – The Florida Department of Health in Bay County (DOH-Bay) reminds all residents and visitors to avoid contact with bats. Bats can spread rabies. Rabies is a fatal viral infection of the nervous system that is spread from **animal to animal** or **animal to human** by bite, scratch, or contact between infected saliva and an open wound or mucous membrane.

“Exposure to rabies can be fatal. It is important not to handle wild animals, to be aware of unusual acting animals, and to keep pets vaccinated against rabies,” said Sandon S. Speedling, MHS, CPM, CPH, Administrator and Health Officer, DOH-Bay.

Bats are beneficial, protected flying mammals that can eat up to half their weight in insects a night; however, bats can also carry rabies. Bats found on the ground are more likely to be rabid. Grounded bats are more likely to be handled by people or have contact with pets. Bats have very small teeth and bite wounds **may not always be noticeable** or bleed. Skin contact with a bat may be considered a possible Rabies exposure, even without evidence of injury.

Rabies also needs to be considered when a bat is found in the living areas of an occupied home or in the presence of small children or pets. If you have skin contact with a bat or find a bat in your home, contact DOH-Bay **immediately** at 850-872-4455. Bats suspected of having contact with people or pets may need to be tested for Rabies.

**If bitten or scratched by an animal, wash the wound immediately with soap and water.**

**Seek medical treatment as needed and report the injury to DOH-Bay at 850-872-4455.** If the animal is stray or wild, call 911 or Bay County Animal Services at 850-767-3333 and report the animal’s location. In the City of Lynn Haven, call the Lynn Haven Police Department at 850-265-1112. Be sure to follow up, as **rabies is preventable when treated in a timely manner.**

The following advice is issued:

- **If your dog or cat fights with a wild animal, contact the Bay County Health Department immediately.** The wild animal will need to be tested for rabies. Your animal may need to be quarantined. Do not shoot suspected rabid animals in the head.
- **Do not touch animals that are not yours.** Avoid contact with **all** wildlife, especially raccoons, bats, bobcats, otters, foxes, skunks, and coyotes. No animal is too young to have rabies. A rabid animal may act friendly.
- Wear rubber gloves and protective eyewear when dressing/butchering wild animals to avoid exposure to Rabies and other diseases.

- Cook all meat thoroughly to 165°F.
- Do not hunt animals that appear sick.
- For general questions pertaining to stray animals or odd acting wild animals, contact your area's animal control department.
- For questions regarding the health of a pet, contact a veterinarian.
- Teach your children about rabies and to **never touch a bat**.

For more information on bats in Florida, see <https://myfwc.com/conservation/you-protect/wildlife/bats/>. For further information on rabies, go to the Florida Department of Health website at <https://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/rabies/index.html> or contact DOH-Bay at 850-872-4455 or follow us on Twitter @FLHealthEmerald.

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