



"Your Local
Health Department"

Branch - Hillsdale - St. Joseph Community Health Agency

570 N. Marshall Road
Coldwater, MI 49036
(517) 279-9561
Fax (517) 278-2923

20 Care Drive
Hillsdale, MI 49242
(517) 437-7395
Fax (517) 437-0166

1110 Hill Street
Three Rivers, MI 49093
(269) 273-2161
Fax (269) 273-2452

www.bhsj.org

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Contact: Rebecca Burns, Health Officer
517-279-9561 ext. 0148#

Yvonne Atwood, Director of Personal Health and Disease Prevention
517-279-9561 ext. 0143#

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Cases of Rabies in Michigan on the Rise

Coldwater, MI. – The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) is seeing an uptick in bats testing positive for rabies. As of June 28, the MDHHS Bureau of Laboratories has identified rabies in 22 bats and two skunks. Last year at this time, MDHHS had identified only nine bats with rabies. The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency reminds residents to adopt practices that protect their families and animals from rabies.

Rabies is a virus that attacks the brain and nervous system. The rabies virus lives in the saliva of infected animals. It is usually spread from animal to animal or from animal to human. Bats and skunks are the most common carriers of rabies in Michigan. In 2017, there were 38 cases of rabies in animals in Michigan, including 35 bats, two skunks and one cat.

Rabies is fatal to humans if left untreated. Post exposure treatment is given to people who are exposed to a potentially rabid animal. Treatment is not necessary if the animal tests negative for rabies.

Protect your family and pets from rabies by taking these simple steps:

- Avoid contact with wild animals. Do not keep wild animals as pets and do not try to rehabilitate wild animals yourself. Wild animals can carry rabies without looking sick.
- If a wild animal appears sick, report it to the [Department of Natural Resources](#) online or at 517-336-5030.
- If you are bitten or scratched by an animal, seek immediate medical attention and alert the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency at 517-279-9561.
- If you find a bat in your home, safely confine or collect the bat if possible and contact your local health department to determine if it should be tested for rabies. More information on how to collect a bat safely can be found on the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website](#).
- If you are unable or would prefer not to confine or collect a bat yourself, you may consider hiring a bat/wildlife removal service.

- Protect your pets by getting them vaccinated against rabies. Even cats that live indoors and never go outside can encounter a bat that gets inside the home.
- If your animal is bitten or scratched by a wild animal, or if you believe they have had unsupervised contact with wildlife, contact your veterinarian as soon as possible. Even if your pet is currently vaccinated against rabies, additional actions may need to be taken to prevent them from becoming infected. If possible, safely confine or capture the wild animal without touching it and contact your local health department, as the animal may need to be tested for rabies.

If you or your child has been bitten by an animal, take the following steps right away:

- Wash the bite area with soap and water for 10 minutes and cover the bite with a clean bandage.
- Immediately call your doctor and go to a nearby emergency department. Anyone with a possible rabies infection must be treated in a hospital.
- Call local animal-control authorities to help find the animal that caused the bite. The animal may need to be detained and observed for signs of rabies.
- If you know the owner of the animal that bit your child, get all the information about the animal, including vaccination status and the owner's name and address. Notify the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency, particularly if the animal hasn't been vaccinated.
- If you suspect that your child was bitten by an unknown dog, bat, rat, or other animal, contact your doctor immediately or take your child to the emergency department.

More information about rabies and a map of rabies positive animals in Michigan can be found at Michigan.gov/rabies. Visit your local health department online at www.bhsj.org.

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