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Risk of rabies from bats

Posted By

Posted 13 hours ago

While health providers are preparing for a possible outbreak of H1N1 flu this fall, the public also needs to be aware of the risks of rabies from animals that may already be found flying around their homes.

As baby bats become mobile from late July through September, these creatures often make their way into living spaces and come into conflict with humans.

"When stressed, these animals can bite or scratch people without them even knowing it," cautions humane wildlife control President Bill Dowd. "They can leave a very small bite that is almost undetectable, which is why health authorities advise people who are bitten, scratched or come into direct contact with a bat to seek medical attention immediately," he adds.

Most people have a fear of bats and those brave enough to try and catch one run the risk of being bitten.

Humane Wildlife Control has staff who are specially trained to find the bats, catch them and have them safely submitted to a rabies testing facility.

Previous policies in Ontario and Quebec advised that an unattended child, cognitively impaired individual or anyone who was asleep in a room with a bat present should be treated for possible rabies infection. Recent research demonstrated that the risk for rabies infection was low among these cases, so policies now only apply to those who are bitten, scratched or come into direct contact with a bat. However, health authorities still advise the public not to try and catch bats themselves due to the risk of infection.

Droppings (guano) and dead bats can cause severe odour, damage and contamination of property and heating/AC systems.


Colonies can range in size from a few to several hundred, depending on the space and availability of food sources. A colony can double in size each year.

Bats are common carriers of bed bugs, which multiply and look for other hosts, such as pets and people, when they roost in buildings. They are extremely difficult to eradicate and bites can cause serious itching and welts.

If inhaled by humans, bat guano can cause an incurable respiratory disease called histoplasmosis. The very young, very old and those with impaired immune systems are at greatest risk for severe illness.

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