

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Case of bat rabies identified in Kanawha County

Dr. Rahul Gupta, Health Officer for the Kanawha-Charleston Health Department, confirmed that a bat found in Kanawha County has tested positive for rabies. The testing was performed at the West Virginia Office of Laboratory Services. The bat was tested after it bit the arm of a woman at her Kanawha County home on Sunday. The woman is undergoing post-exposure treatment for rabies.

According to Dr. Gupta, finding a rabid animal in Kanawha County is a rare occurrence. Since 2000 only 6 bats and 1 fox found in the county have tested positive for rabies. This is the first confirmed case of animal rabies in Kanawha County since 2004, reported Gupta.

Although rabies is rare in our area, it is almost always fatal in humans who do not receive proper treatment after an exposure. It is an important goal of public health to prevent the occurrence of rabies in humans. We achieve this by increasing the public's awareness of the disease through education and assuring that proper treatment is given when there is a possible exposure, added Gupta.

Rabies affects the central nervous system and is caused by a virus that is typically found in the saliva of clinically ill mammals. It can be transmitted from animals to humans through a bite or contact to saliva that directly enters the body through the eyes, nose, mouth or a wound of an individual. It cannot be transmitted from contact with feces, urine or from touching the fur of a bat.

In the United States, most cases of rabies occur in raccoons, skunks, foxes, and various species of bats. Most cases of animal rabies in West Virginia occur in the State's eastern counties.

Most bats do not have rabies. According to the CDC, 94% of bats tested do not have rabies. You cannot usually tell if a bat has rabies. For this reason, it is best never to handle any bat. Any bat that is active in the day, found in a place where bats are not usually seen (in a room in your house or on the lawn) or is unable to fly is far more likely than others to have rabies. The only way to confirm rabies is through laboratory testing. Because bat injuries may be very small, it may be difficult to tell if you have actually been bitten by a bat. Any direct contact between a person and a bat should be evaluated for a rabies exposure.

Bats are an important part of our environment. Do not try to kill or capture a bat. If you think you have had a possible exposure to a bat, the best thing to do is to wash the affected area without delay and get medical advice immediately. If you would like more information about rabies, contact the Kanawha-Charleston Health Department or visit our website at www.kchdvw.org.

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