



State of Wisconsin  
**Department of Health Services**

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Jim Doyle, Governor  
Karen E. Timberlake, Secretary

**For Immediate Release**

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## **Health Officials Urge Caution Around Wild Animals**

*Protect Yourself from Exposure to Rabies*

As Wisconsin residents head outdoors to enjoy summertime activities, state health officials remind people to use caution around wild animals to protect themselves against rabies, a viral disease transmitted by bites from infected animals.

“The best method of prevention is to use caution around unfamiliar animals,” Jim Kazmierczak, State Public Health Veterinarian of the Department of Health Services. “If you are bitten by an animal, wash the wound immediately with plenty of soap and water and contact your physician and local health department. If you can do so safely, capture and confine the animal so it may be tested for the virus.”

Often, people turn loose or destroy the animal, rather than safely capturing it. In the vast majority of cases, if the animal is either placed under observation or tested for rabies, no anti-rabies shots are needed for the bite victim. Dogs and cats that bite humans can simply be observed and checked by a veterinarian.

Bats and skunks are the most likely to carry the rabies virus, but dogs, cats, raccoons and foxes can also transmit the disease. To help avoid possible exposure to rabies:

- Avoid contact with wild animals, especially if they approach you or you observe them acting abnormal or sick, indicators that they may be infected. Do not try to nurse a sick animal back to health. Call an animal control official or a wildlife rehabilitator if you find a sick animal.
- Never touch unfamiliar or wild animals and teach children to do likewise. Stray cats and dogs may not be accustomed to being handled and are more likely to bite.
- Never adopt wild animals or bring them into your home. Even baby animals can carry rabies.
- Walk your dog on a leash and do not let them roam freely where wild animals may be present.
- Secure trash cans and pet foods so they will not attract wild animals.
- Keep bats out of living areas by securing open or loose fitting doors, attics, unscreened windows and chimneys. Protecting your home can significantly reduce the potential for rabies exposure for you and your pets, as bat bites are small and may go unnoticed. Most recent human rabies cases in the U.S. have resulted from contact with bats.

Human rabies cases are very rare in the United States. In Wisconsin, the most recent cases of human rabies occurred in 2000 and 2004, in both cases resulting from a bite from an infected bat.

For more information on rabies, visit: <http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/communicable/factsheets/Rabies.htm>

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