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NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

To: Local Media

From: Katrina Harwood, Health Officer

Date: September 19, 2022

Rabies Confirmed in Rock County Bat

Rock County, WI – A Rock County bat submitted to the Wisconsin State Lab of Hygiene has tested positive for rabies. At this time, no human contact with the bat has been reported. While it is not uncommon for Rock County to have at least one rabid bat a year, this positive rabies result is a reminder that this fatal disease is present in our community's wildlife.

Rabies is an infectious disease that affects the nervous system of humans and other mammals. The rabies virus is transmitted through direct contact, usually a bite, from an animal with rabies. The virus is regularly found in wild mammals such as raccoons, skunks, foxes, and coyotes. However, bats cause the majority of rabies cases in humans.

Rabies can spread from bats to people through small, minor bites that may go unnoticed. Though bats are commonly found outdoors, bats can enter your home through small openings in screens, around chimney caps, underneath door gaps or any hole larger than a quarter-inch by half-inch. If you find a bat in your home, contact the Rock County Public Health Department for instructions on how to proceed.

Rabies is a deadly disease, but there are steps you can take to prevent spread of the virus. Avoid wild or stray animals, especially commonly affected animals like raccoons, skunks, bats, foxes, and coyotes. Also, learn the signs of rabies, such as excessive drooling or aggression, and animals that are acting out of character, such as a raccoon that is out during the day. If you are a parent, teach your child about rabies and how to protect themselves. If you are a pet owner, visit the veterinarian on a regular basis and keep your pet's rabies vaccinations up to date. To prevent bats from coming into your home, "bat proof" your house through locating and sealing potential entrances.

If you have been in contact with any wildlife or unfamiliar animals, especially if you have been bitten or scratched, talk with your healthcare provider or local health department to determine your risk for rabies or other illnesses. If you have been bitten or scratched, thoroughly wash the wound with soap and water and immediately make plans to see your healthcare provider.

If you capture a dead, sick, or injured bat, you can have it tested for rabies. If possible, do not freeze or destroy the animal to allow for more accurate testing. For more information on rabies, contact the Rock County Public Health Department at 608-757-5440 or visit the department's website at <https://www.co.rock.wi.us/departments/public-health>.

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Rock County Public Health Department serves Rock County residents by improving population health outcomes and removing barriers through community partnerships to provide everyone the opportunity to reach their full health potential. Visit the Rock County Public Health Department website at www.co.rock.wi.us/departments/public-health and follow them on social media @rockcountyphd.

Please send all media inquiries to Media.PublicHealth@co.rock.wi.us.