



GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

COMMUNITY HEALTH
2600 LaFranier Road, Suite A
Traverse City, MI 49686
231-995-6111

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH
2650 LaFranier Road
Traverse City, MI 49686
231-995-6051

ADMINISTRATION &
MEDICAL EXAMINER
2600 LaFranier Road, Suite A
Traverse City, MI 49686
231-995-6100

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT &
PUBLIC HEALTH PREPAREDNESS
2600 LaFranier Road, Suite A
Traverse City, MI 49686
231-995-6100

www.gtchd.org

IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Grand Traverse County bat tests positive for rabies

A bat from Grand Traverse County that was sent to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services state laboratory has tested positive for rabies. The bat was received on Friday, August 7 and results were reported to the Grand Traverse County Health Department on Tuesday, August 11. This is the first confirmed specimen that has tested positive for the virus in Grand Traverse County since 2017 and only the third since 2012.

With the Stay Home, Stay Safe Executive Order in place, many businesses were closed this past spring, including veterinarians. With the closures, it is understandable that some family pets may have experienced a lapse in vaccinations. However, as we continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic, the Grand Traverse County Health Department wants to remind the public that it is important to make sure your pets are current on their vaccinations, including rabies.

There is no known cure for rabies, however post-exposure prophylaxis (vaccinations) are available and are given based on the type of exposure that occurred. The following are taken into consideration prior to administering post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP):

- What type of animal you were exposed to.
- Whether the animal you were exposed to is available to be tested.
- Circumstances of the exposure.
- Current surveillance data from the geographical area in which the exposure occurred.

A decision will be made in consultation with your healthcare provider and local health department.

These steps should be taken to minimize exposure to rabies:

- Vaccinate dogs, cats, ferrets, horses and other selected livestock for rabies and keep vaccinations current.
- Report any unusual animal behavior to Animal Control at the non-emergency number (231-995-6080).
 - Unusual animal behaviors include, but are not limited to:
 - bats active during daylight hours,
 - excessive drooling or foaming at the mouth,
 - aggressive behaviors,
- Avoid contact with stray and wild animals.
- Keep pets under supervision in a yard or on a leash to minimize contact with wild animals.
- Teach children to never approach unfamiliar dogs, cats or wildlife, even if they appear friendly.
- Treat animal bites with soap and water and contact a medical professional immediately.

- People waking to find a bat in their room or a child's room should capture/collect the bat if possible to submit for testing. Test results are a critical component of the decision process for PEP. Bats have such small teeth even unknown or minor contact with bats has led to rabies infection.
- Contact the Communicable Disease office at the Health Department to report exposure to an animal that is known to carry rabies, such as a dog bite or waking up to a bat in your house.

"Bat activity in our area peaks during late summer which is evident by the number of bats submitted to the Health Department for testing during this time every year. It is really important to keep the bat for testing when a possible exposure occurs. If there is no bat to test, the likelihood of needing PEP increases substantially, which is very costly. Rabies is fatal if not treated in a timely manner, so the stakes are very high," said Dan Thorell, Environmental Health Director, Grand Traverse County Health Department.

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Media contact:
Emmy Schumacher
eschumacer@gtchd.org
231-493-8376