

ONEIDA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

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Bats Should Be Tested Before Release

Bats found in living spaces of the home should be tested for rabies before releasing or disposing of them the Oneida County Health Department warns.

"This is the time of year that we begin receiving phone calls concerning bats getting into people's homes; in many cases residents are releasing the bats outdoors before contacting the health department so that it can be determined if there has been any human exposure to rabies or if the animal needs to be tested," said Dr. Gayle Jones, Director of the Oneida County Health Department. Jones added, *"Most post exposure rabies treatments in Oneida County are a result of exposure to bats."*

Oneida County Executive Anthony Picente said that while most of us are repulsed by the furry, winged creatures and instinctively want to shoo them out our houses as quickly as possible, this is not the prudent thing to do given the risk of possible exposure to rabies.

"Rabies is a fatal disease when left untreated and it's the goal of public health to prevent human exposure to the rabies virus through education and prevention by anti-rabies treatment should exposure occur. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, tens of thousands of people are successfully treated each year after being bitten by a rabid animal, but a few die because they don't recognize the risk of rabies and do not seek medical advice," Picente said.

Most bats are not rabid and while rabies can only be confirmed by laboratory testing, certain bat behavior can be indicative of infection. These include:

- any bat that is active by day
- any bat that found in an area where they are not usually seen (for example, in the living spaces of your home or on the lawn).
- any bat that is unable to fly

Although rabies cannot be contracted from contact with bat guano (feces), blood, urine, or touching the animal's fur, health department officials urge people to never handle bats. Most people would know if they had been bitten by a bat, but since bats' teeth are very small a bite wound can be superficial and not always apparent.

"If you awaken and find a bat in your room, see a bat in the room of an unattended child, or see a bat near a mentally impaired or intoxicated person, capture the bat, have it tested and seek medical advice," Jones stressed. She continued, *"If a wound is apparent, wash it thoroughly with soap and water and seek immediate medical attention."*

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To safely capture a bat in your home follow these precautions:

- Wait for the bat to land. Wearing leather work gloves, cover the bat with a coffee can or cardboard box
- Slide a piece of cardboard under the container to trap the bat
- Tape the cardboard to the container securely and punch small holes in the box allowing the bat to breathe
- Contact the health department to arrange for testing

(A video showing the proper procedure for capturing a bat can be viewed at ocgov.net)

Testing is free, according to the health department.

Jones said people can take measures to 'bat proof' their homes by plugging any openings larger than a quarter-inch by half-inch with caulk or steel wool, keeping outside doors and unscreened windows closed and draft guards under doors. Attic entry points can be covered by hanging clear plastic sheeting or bird netting outside the openings. This will allow bats to crawl out, but not enter the attic space.

Finally, pet owners should be sure that their pets are currently vaccinated against rabies to protect them from infection. The Oneida County Health Department holds a number of rabies vaccination clinics throughout the year and provides the shots for a nominal donation. A complete schedule of rabies clinics can be found on our web site or by calling the Health Department at **798-5064**.

For more information about rabies, or to arrange testing of a captured bat, call the Oneida County Health Department or go to our web site at www.ocgov.net.

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