



Robert P. Astorino, Westchester County Executive

NEWS RELEASE

Sherlita Amler, MD, Commissioner, Department of Health

Ned McCormack, Communications Director

Contact: Caren Halbfinger (914) 813-5013 / after hours: 813-5000

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 13, 2014

BATS ARE BACK: IF YOU FIND A BAT IN YOUR HOME, CATCH AND KEEP IT FOR TESTING!

Bats are back, making their way into Westchester homes this month, and the Westchester County Health Department wants residents to know what to do if these unwelcome visitors drop in.

“We’d like everyone to catch the bat,” said Health Commissioner Sherlita Amler, MD. “Most of the time, the bats tested are not rabid, so you and your family can be spared unneeded treatment. But rabies is fatal, so without the bat to test, you will most likely have to get rabies shots.”

During the first week in August, 43 bats were brought to the health department for testing because they were found in a home. Since none of those bats tested positive for rabies, none of these residents had to be treated preventively for rabies. However, so far this month, 17 people who were exposed to a bat but did not catch it for testing had to begin preventive treatment for rabies.

There is a better way. If you find a bat in your home, don’t panic and never let the bat fly out the window. **To learn how to safely capture a bat in your home, watch the video on the health department website at www.westchestergov.com/health. If there’s a chance that a person or pet in your house had contact with the bat, catch that bat and call the health department at 914-813-5000 to arrange to have it tested for rabies.**

For those who capture the bat, 97 percent of the bats tested do not have rabies, so those residents are spared the series of rabies shots. As long as the bat is not rabid, no one will need rabies shots. But if the bat is rabid, a series of life-saving vaccines must begin soon.

For each of the past five years, about 148 Westchester residents have required rabies treatment after being exposed to bats that could not be caught for testing. In most cases, treatment could have been avoided if the bat had been caught and tested for rabies. Whenever a bat is found in a room with a sleeping or mentally impaired person or with a young child or pet, contact with the bat must be suspected and it is essential to call the Westchester County Health Department at (914) 813-5000.

MORE

Here's how to safely catch a bat:

1. Close windows and doors so the bat cannot escape.
2. Wear thick gloves and grab a container (such as a coffee can), a piece of cardboard and some tape.
3. Wait until the bat has settled on a wall.
4. Place the container over the bat, trapping it against the wall.
5. Slide the cardboard between the wall and container to trap the bat inside.
6. Tape the cardboard to the container
7. It's critical to keep it on ice in a cooler or double-bag it and place it in the freezer.
8. Call the Health Department at (914) 813-5000 for advice on submitting the bat for testing.

It's also a good idea to learn how to bat-proof your home, by adding screens to your eaves and attic openings. Another favorite place for bats to hang out is inside your closed patio umbrella, so beware when you open it.

From 1995 to 2011, 49 people died of rabies in the U.S; 35 of them had been exposed to bats, according to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention.

For more information on rabies, Like us at www.Facebook.com/wchealthdept, Follow us on Twitter @wchealthdept, call the Westchester County Health Department at (914) 813-5000, or visit our website at www.westchestergov.com/health.