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## Officials warn residents not to handle bats

*An increased number of bats in suburban Cook County have tested positive for rabies*

Cook County Department of Public Health officials are warning residents to avoid contact with bats due to a higher number of rabid bats being found. So far in 2010, ten bats have tested positive for rabies in suburban Cook County compared to three last year at this time. Of the ten, seven were found in the La Grange and La Grange Park communities. The three other bats were located in Park Ridge, Wilmette, and Palos Hills.

Rabies is a virus that affects the nervous system of humans and other mammals. A person gets rabies through a bite or scratch from an infected animal or if the saliva from an infected animal comes in contact with their nose, mouth, eyes or through an open wound. A bat bite or scratch may not be seen or even felt by the injured person due to the small size of its teeth and claws. A potential rabies exposure should never be taken lightly. If untreated, rabies is fatal.

“If you encounter a bat, dead or alive, do not touch, hit or destroy it, and do not attempt get it out of your home,” said Stephen A. Martin, Jr., Ph.D., M.P.H., chief operating officer of CCDPH. “Contact your local animal control officer to collect the bat. If you or a family member does come in contact with a bat, call our health department at 708-492-2150 to report the exposure.”

Recommendations for preventing the spread of rabies:

- Never touch a bat or other wild animals such as a skunk, raccoon, fox or a coyote as they can have rabies.
- Keep your pets vaccinated. Rabies vaccinations for dogs, cats and ferrets are required by law.
- Teach children never to touch a bat they find lying on the ground – it may be ill and could still bite.
- Call your local animal control office to report a bat in your home or a dead bat on your property.
- Call the Cook County Department of Public Health at 708-492-2150 to report human exposure to a bat.

For more information please visit [www.cookcountypublichealth.org](http://www.cookcountypublichealth.org), or call CCDPH at 708-492-2000.

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