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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

To: All Media
From: Joel Strasz, Public Health Officer – Bay County Health Department
Date: July 21, 2023
Re: **Two Rabies-positive Bats Detected in Bay County**

BAY COUNTY, MICHIGAN – Since the beginning of June, two bats found in Bay County have tested positive for rabies. These bats were presented to Bay County Animal Services and then sent to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services for laboratory testing. The Bay County Health Department would like to inform local residents of the risks associated with rabies and provide home and pet owners with practical steps to protect themselves and their pets.

Rabies is a viral disease that affects the central nervous system and is fatal once symptoms appear. Rabies can spread to people and pets from infected, or rabid, bats after minor, seemingly unimportant, or unrecognized bites or scratches. Any direct contact with a bat represents a potential exposure to rabies. Other possible exposures include finding a bat in the same room as a person who may not be aware that contact (i.e., through a bite or saliva) has occurred, such as a sleeping person, a child, or someone who is mentally impaired or intoxicated.

While some animals may not show any signs of having rabies, some general things to look for are:

- General sickness
- Problems swallowing
- Lots of drool or saliva
- An animal that bites at everything
- An animal that appears tamer than you would expect
- An animal that is having trouble moving or may even be paralyzed
- At bat that is on the ground

If someone has been bitten by an animal or has been in contact with, exposed to, or bitten by a bat, contact BCHD at (989) 895-4003 as soon as possible. The law requires all animal bites to be reported to local Animal Control and the local health department.

If someone may have been exposed to a bat, do not let the bat go. Safely capture the bat for rabies testing and immediately contact BCHD. Information on how to collect a bat safely can be found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/rabies/animals/bats/index.html#capture> or in this video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=NNw6hkFETOk. If the bat is unavailable for testing, treatment will be recommended to prevent rabies. If the bat is tested and does not have rabies, treatment is not needed.

It is also important to protect pets against rabies. **The best way to do this is to have dogs, cats, ferrets, and horses vaccinated against rabies by a veterinarian. It is also important to prevent pets from coming into contact with wild animals while outside.** If a pet might have been bitten or

scratched by a wild animal such as a bat, raccoon, or skunk, please contact a veterinarian as soon as possible.

“It is common to see an uptick in bat encounters every July and August,” says Joel Strasz, Health Officer at BCHD. “It is extremely important to be able to perform tests on these animals, so that residents who come into contact can be properly treated and vaccinated, if it is necessary. Even if no one has been bitten by a bat you find in your home, please capture it and send it to Animal Services for testing. Just as important is for residents to get their pets vaccinated on a timely basis.”

To learn more about rabies, visit Michigan’s website: Michigan.gov/Rabies. To contact Bay County Animal Services, please call (989) 894-0679 during normal business hours.

If you have questions about rabies, please contact the BCHD Communicable Disease Department at (989) 895-4003, Monday through Friday, 8am-5pm.

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