Allegany COUNTY New York

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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TO: **All Media Sources**
FROM: **Theresa K. Moore, Supervising Public Health Educator/Public Information Officer**
RE: **Catch the Bat!**
DATE: **August 6, 2020**

The following is a news release on "Catch the Bat" in Allegany County. The Allegany County Department of Health would like to remind residents and visitors, if you find a bat in your home that may have been in contact with a person or pet, please "Catch the Bat"! Do not release it!

Please release this information as soon as possible. Thank you for your assistance and cooperation. If you have any questions or need more information, please send the request in writing to me at mooretk@alleganyco.com or by fax at 585-268-9264.

News Release: Catch the Bat!

Bats are the leading cause of human rabies deaths in the U.S. These deaths are primarily linked to in apparent or unreported exposures from bats inside occupied structures such as homes or camps. It is not unusual to find bats in homes in New York State, and the presence of bats usually does not result in a need for rabies post exposure prophylaxis. Most (97%) bats tested at the NYS Wadsworth Center's Rabies Laboratory are negative for rabies. However, many of the human rabies cases in the United States since 1990 appear to have acquired their disease from an unrecognized bat bite in a home situation. That is why it is so important to **"CATCH THE BAT"!**

Here are steps to take to keep bats out of the home environment, especially sleeping quarters:

- **Close unscreened doors and windows** open to the outside.
- **Use window screens, chimney caps, and draft-guards beneath doors to attics**,
- **Seal up all openings larger than 1/2 inch by 1/2 inch square** into the attic, basement, walls, or occupied areas of the house including electrical and plumbing openings.
    - Use materials such as expanding spray-on foam, caulk, wire mesh, wood that fits tightly, steel wool (around pipes that enter buildings), or polypropylene bird netting, to seal or cover gaps and holes.
- **Listen to see if you hear squeaking noises** coming from attic, walls, or elsewhere.
- **Check** attic space, rafters, porches, and walls for signs of roosting bats, including bat guano and crystallized urine, or bare scratched areas on beams.
- **Walk around the outside of the house** at dusk to see if bats are flying out of the house to feed and before dawn to see if bats are flying into the house to roost.
- **Special netting** can be used to allow bats to exit a house, but not re-enter.

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- **Pest control experts** specializing in bat control should be consulted when necessary.
- Killing or poisoning the bats is seldom a necessary or desirable solution.
- **DO NOT seal openings while bats are inside**--this may drive them into occupied areas or create a sanitary problem if the bats are trapped and die inside.
- **Major home renovations and sealing should be done during the winter** when bats have mostly left buildings.

The Allegany County Department of Health would like to remind you, if you find a bat in your home that may have been in contact with a person or pet, please **CATCH THE BAT! DO NOT RELEASE IT!!!** A child, an older person, someone who is speech impaired, or someone who is sleeping while a bat is in their room may not be able to tell you if they were bitten. When the bat is not available to be tested – it has been destroyed, set free, or thrown away –the recommendation from the New York State Department of Health and the Allegany County Department of Health would be that everyone who may have been in the direct room with the bat while sleeping, or bitten by the bat, have the post exposure rabies vaccinations.

Things to remember:

- **How to capture a bat.**
  - turn on room lights and close the windows
  - close the room and closet doors
  - wait for the bat to land
  - wearing heavy gloves, place a coffee can, pail or similar container over the bat
  - slide a piece of cardboard underneath the container or against the top of the container, turn it right side up and tape the cardboard tightly to the container.
- Download a video on how to catch a bat at www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/zoonoses/rabies/ (box on upper left side of page).
- **Children sleep heavily** and may not awaken from the presence of a small bat.
- **A bat bite can be small** and not easily noticed.
- **For assistance with "bat-proofing" your home**, See the list at the beginning of article.
- **DO THE MATH**. If you have the bat and it needs to be tested, you and your family have at least a chance the bat will not have rabies and you will not need vaccinations. If there is no bat to test, your chances of receiving the post exposure vaccinations is 100%.
- **CATCH AND KEEP** any bat found inside your home**.**
- **Contact the Allegany County Department of Health- Environmental Health Division at 585-268-9266 or 585-268-9250 and press 1 with questions or for more information.**
  - **Speak to a Public Health Sanitarian** about whether or not the bat needs to be sent in for testing. They will ask questions about where and when the bat was found in your home and who had contact or possible contact with the bat.
- **Keep your pets' current on rabies vaccinations!** The Health Department offers free rabies vaccination clinics every few months to assist in keeping your pet vaccinated and up to date.

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