



Michael R. Pence
Governor

William C. VanNess II, MD
State Health Commissioner

April 4, 2013

Dear Indiana Summer Youth Camp Directors:

Since summer camp season is almost here, the Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) would like to remind you of the risk of bats to your staff and campers. Bats are very common forms of wildlife and are often reported in and around summer youth camps. While most bats are not a risk to humans, a small number of them have the rabies virus. This virus is almost 100% fatal. In Indiana, the most common source of rabies virus to humans are bats. In the recent past, two Hoosiers have died from rabies virus they got from a bat. You cannot see which bats have rabies and which do not. For this reason, all bat exposures, and not just bites, to humans are reportable. Bat exposures or bites must be reported to the local health department as soon as possible (within 24 hours) so that the bat, if available, can be tested for rabies. Without testing the animal, or if the animal is rabies positive, exposed people may have to have expensive medical treatment. This treatment is life-saving but may be avoided if the bat is quickly captured and tests negative.

The majority of bat exposures occur when bats are found in human living spaces, including summer camp cabins. Before opening cabins and other locations for sleeping, you should complete a bat inspection. If there is any evidence of bats roosting in those locations, they should not be used for sleeping or children's activities until the bats can be safely removed and the building bat-proofed. Any opening larger than ¼ inch (including those for electrical and plumbing) should be sealed to prevent the bats from coming back; it is important not to seal these entrances/exits until all bats have left the location (sealing bats inside a facility can increase exposure risk). Bat exclusion activities should occur from April-May or from August-October to avoid hibernation times and maternity colonies.

The ISDH recommends that all camps hold a safety briefing at the start of each camp session to educate staff and campers that wildlife may carry diseases and should only be viewed from a distance and never handled. Any direct contact between a person and wildlife should be immediately reported to an adult at the

camp. That adult should report any animal bites or bat exposures to the local health department for follow-up.

Bats should be submitted for rabies testing *when a bite has occurred, when there has been direct contact between a human and a bat, or when a bat is found in a room with someone who might be unaware of contact.* Unaware situations would include someone who is sleeping, a child, a mentally disabled person, or someone who is intoxicated in some way. To avoid these types of exposures, efforts should be taken to prevent bats from inhabiting any type of human living space. Bats that are viewed from a distance and do not have any direct contact with people do not need to be tested as long as they are avoided.

For advice or help on bat issues, please contact your local wildlife biologist. Contact information for those individuals may be found at <http://www.in.gov/dnr/fishwild/2716.htm>. You may also contact Dr. Jennifer House (below) for any rabies questions.

Sincerely,



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