

## Humane Officer's Corner

I just got off the phone with an excited homeowner. A bat had gotten into the living area of her home and her cat had discovered it. The cat thought this fluttering, buzzing little critter was the most entertaining toy she had ever received! The owner wasn't quite as impressed with this winged visitor. She was rightly concerned because healthy-looking bats can be carrying the rabies virus. She had never had her cat vaccinated for rabies because it was an inside cat. My advice is to spend the extra money and get your pets vaccinated for rabies. It keeps them safely protected, which in turn protects your family.

Unvaccinated or overdue rabies vaccinations come to light quite often in my rabies control job. The cat in this situation was definitely exposed to the bat. She had killed it. Bat bites and scratches are so small, one would not likely find a wound on the cat. Even on a human, a small scratch might go unnoticed, but it can be enough to let in the deadly rabies virus.

My department's response is not nearly as exciting as finding the bat in your home, but it is important! First comes the interview. We ask a lot of questions. Which, if any, people handled the bat? Does the homeowner have other pets that may have had access to the bat? Was the bat in the home overnight? Was it found in a bedroom? Do family members sleep with their bedroom doors closed? This helps determine if we need to consider human exposures to the bat. Is the bat still there? Does he have bat friends with him?

If an exposure is suspected, the best course of action is to have the bat tested for rabies. The county has funds set aside for this testing. Sometimes the bat escapes, is eaten by the dog, is thrown away or released. If that is the situation, I advise people to speak with their doctor and/or veterinarian regarding follow up. Some humane cases indicate a need to have PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) vaccinations. For your pets, rabies booster shots are advised to be given as soon as possible after the exposure. Each exposure concern is handled on a case by case basis. Our goal is to keep our residents and their pets healthy and safe! It is not safe to take a "wait and see" attitude with potential bat exposures. By the time symptoms appear, it is usually too late to treat medically.

Another consideration is how to prevent future exposures to bats. We live in mosquito country, so all summer long the bats are very active gobbling up these pests. They like to raise their young in crevices, attics and snug, weatherproof places. Bats can fit through openings as small as a dime. Exclusionary work can be done by professionals and by property owners. There are lots of online sites with advice in this area. Wildlife in Need has great information on bat-proofing as well and can be reached at 262-968-5075. The biggest trick is to block bats out of your home, not trap them in!

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Ps. The cat in this article and her family are all fine. Work was done on their home to keep bats out.