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Lord Fairfax Health District Warns Residents of Rabies Risk
Health Department Offers Tips to Stay Safe

(Winchester, Va.) — On the morning of July 16, 2021, two bats were found dead on the sidewalk, on the 200 block of Darby Drive on the southeast side of Winchester. Both bats were collected and later tested positive for rabies, according to the Lord Fairfax Health District.

"These animals no longer pose a threat," stated Lord Fairfax Health District Director Dr. Colin Greene, "however, anyone who believes that they, their child, or their pet, might have handled or come in physical contact with the bats should immediately call the Frederick-Winchester Health Department at 540-722-3480. Everyone should keep in mind that any bite, scratch, or lick from a raccoon, fox, skunk, bat, or feral cat that could result in exposure to the animal's saliva should be considered a potential rabies exposure. This applies to humans and domestic animals, and any person or animal so exposed should receive an immediate medical evaluation. The health department further advises:

- Never approach, touch, or handle wild animals, especially any raccoon, fox, skunk or bat, and especially if it is behaving oddly or if it is seen in the daylight. These animals are the main carriers of rabies in the eastern United States.
- Avoid stray cats and dogs. Feral or unknown cats and dogs may also carry rabies; feral cats are especially high-risk. Report bites or scratches from these animals to your physician or the health department right away.
- Vaccinate all cats, dogs and ferrets against rabies (even if they don't go outdoors) and keep their shots up to date. Vaccinate working barn cats as well, for their protection and yours. Discuss vaccinating livestock with your veterinarian.
- Do not feed wild animals or stray cats and dogs. Eliminate outdoor food sources around the home.
- Keep pets confined to your property or walk them on a leash.
- If one of your domestic animals is bitten or otherwise interacts with a wild animal, notify the local health department and animal control officer at once, and have your animal seen by a veterinarian.

If you are bitten, scratched, or licked by any of these high-risk animals, seek medical attention immediately. Rabies is fatal to both animals and humans once symptoms begin, but it can be prevented in humans if they receive vaccine and medication soon after exposure.

Finally, if in doubt, or if you have a question, call the Frederick/Winchester Health Department at 540-722-3480.

Additional information on rabies is available at www.cdc.gov/rabies/index.html.

The Lord Fairfax Health District serves residents in the city of Winchester and Clarke, Frederick, Page, Shenandoah and Warren counties. For more information, visit lfhd.org.