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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**BATS MAY BE DEADLIER THAN YOU THINK: A REMINDER FROM
THE WESTCHESTER COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

We usually only see them at dusk or dawn. Mysterious creatures in acrobatic flight; they are a marvel to some and a horror to others. But what many people do not know is that bats pose the highest risk of transmitting rabies to humans.

“At this time of year the young bats are beginning to fly so there are more of them around and their inexperience may lead to greater likelihood of contact with humans,” said Joshua Lipsman, M.D., M.P.H., Westchester County Commissioner of Health. “This, unfortunately, increases the possibility of rabies exposure.”

Rabies is a fatal disease spread through the bite or saliva of an infected animal. Although it is more commonly associated with larger mammals, the only human rabies deaths in New York State in the past 40 years were caused by bats.

A bite or scratch from a wild or stray animal, or contact with its saliva through your eyes, nose, mouth or an open wound, may expose you to the possibility of rabies. Symptoms of rabies infection can appear within two weeks or up to several months later. The problem is that, once symptoms do appear, it is almost always too late for effective treatment. This is why treatment must be given whenever exposure is suspected, without waiting for symptoms to confirm infection.

“The key to preventing rabies deaths is to inform the public of the absolute necessity of seeking medical advice after being bitten or scratched by a wild or stray animal,” said Dr. Lipsman.

In this regard, bats pose a particular risk. Since their teeth are so sharp and small, it is possible to be bitten or scratched by a bat without even knowing it. For this reason, any physical contact with a bat must be regarded as a possible rabies exposure and reported to the Health Department, even if the physical contact is only suspected.

“If you wake up with a bat flying around in your bedroom, consider yourself potentially exposed to rabies and call the Health Department,” said Dr. Lipsman. “The bat may have touched or bitten you in the night without you being aware of it. Also, if a bat is found in the room with a child or someone with reduced mental capacity it should be reported. Of the people who died from bat rabies in the United States over the past ten years, only one of the victims was aware of being bitten.”

The Westchester County Health Department offers this advice if you find a bat in your home:

- Do not let the bat escape
- Capture the bat using thick gloves and a coffee can with a lid
- Call the Health Department at (914) 813-5000 for advice on submitting the bat for testing

As we move into late fall and winter, most bats will be hibernating in caves making it a great time to block potential roosting sites with screening material. Preventing bats from roosting on your property is the first line of defense against bat rabies. In spring and summer, bats roost in such places as vents, hollow walls, under porch roofs, in spaces behind chimneys and in virtually any small crevice. They feed at night then return to the roost before daylight.

Remember that bats are usually very small and can get into tiny spots. Another popular spot for bats to sleep during the day is beneath patio umbrellas. Residents are advised to be careful opening or closing these umbrellas and should check for bats before sitting under them.

For more information on rabies, call the Westchester County Health Department at (914) 813-5000, or visit our website at www.westchestergov.com/health.