

Harris County  
**HCPHES**  
Public Health & Environmental Services

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**For Immediate Release**

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## Human Case of Rabies in Harris County

Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services (HCPHES) reports a confirmed diagnosis of rabies in a teenage male resident who came into contact with a bat. The bat entered his room through an open window while he was resting. He awakened and alerted family members. The bat was captured and subsequently released out of the window.

The school district will send letters home to parents today. HCPHES is conducting a thorough investigation of the case and is working with the appropriate partners to identify individuals who may have potentially been exposed. It is important for the community to recognize that the risk of getting rabies from an infected **person** is extremely low. *In fact, with the exception of organ and cornea donations, there have been no documented cases of human to human transmission of rabies.*

The last human case of rabies in the Harris County area occurred in a male resident in 1997. Between 1990 and August, 2005 there were only 48 cases of human rabies reported in the United States.

Rabies is a deadly viral disease that affects the central nervous system (brain and spinal cord). People get rabies from the bite of an animal with rabies. You can also be exposed to rabies if infected saliva or tissue containing rabies gets into a fresh wound (one that has bled within 24 hours) or the eyes, nose or mouth. ***In Texas the five high risk wild animals for rabies are bats, skunks, raccoons, foxes and coyotes.***

Most people infected with rabies begin to show signs of the disease one to three months after infection. The early symptoms of rabies include irritability, confusion, headache, fever, hallucinations and itching or pain at the site of the bite. Once symptoms appear, the disease is nearly always fatal. ***However, rabies can be successfully prevented with rabies vaccine.***

Most of the recent human rabies cases in the United States have been caused by rabies virus in bats. Rabid bats also accounted for 19.9% of all cases of rabies in animals in the United States during 2004. Bats have small, sharp teeth that may not leave a visible puncture wound or noticeable pain at the bite site. It is possible to be bitten by a bat and not realize it. ***Therefore, it is very important to seek medical attention: a) if you awaken and there is a bat in your home and/or b) you have had any physical contact with a bat.*** It is important to remember bats that are active by day, found in a place where bats are not usually seen, and are unable to fly may have rabies.

Bat should always be prevented from entering your home. Contact an animal control or wildlife conservation agency to learn how to “bat-proof” your home. There are several steps you should take if you choose to “bat-proof” your home. Check your home for holes that might allow bats entry into living areas. Openings larger than a quarter-inch by a half-inch should be caulked. Use window screens, chimney caps, fill electrical and plumbing holes with stainless steel wool or caulking and make sure that all doors to the outside are closed tightly. If you already have bats in your home, you should observe where the bats exit at dusk and block that area by loosely hanging clear plastic sheeting or bird netting over these areas. That way, the bats can crawl out and leave, but cannot re-enter. After all the bats have left, permanently seal the opening.

***If you think you have been bitten by a rabid animal wash the wound with soap and water for five minutes and seek medical attention immediately. If you think your pet or domestic animal has been bitten by a bat, contact your local animal control agency immediately.***

***For concerns about contact with bats please call Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services Veterinary Public Health Division at 281-999-3191.***

**For concerns about potential contact with the student call Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services at 713-212-0200.**

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