



News from the Office of  
**ERIE COUNTY EXECUTIVE MARK POLONCARZ**

## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **Health Commissioner Dr. Gale Burstein**

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### **BURSTEIN ISSUES REMINDER ON RABIES AWARENESS**

*Warm Winter, Active Wildlife Lead to Commissioner's Call to Raise Awareness, "Keep the Bat"*

**ERIE COUNTY, NY**— Today, Erie County Health Commissioner Dr. Gale Burstein issued a reminder for all residents to practice safety around wildlife and be aware of the danger that the rabies virus poses for humans and their pets. Raccoons, skunks, foxes, and bats are the four types of wild warm blooded animals that are presumed to have rabies and must be avoided; other warm blooded animals can carry rabies as well. About 4% of all bats submitted for testing are found to have rabies.

"We are encouraging everyone to stay away from wildlife, particularly any animals that may be acting strangely or erratically, and to notify the Erie County Department of Health (ECDOH) whenever suspicious animals are observed," **said Burstein**. "Most of the recent human rabies cases in the United States have been caused by bats, however, so it's important that people learn more about how to protect themselves, their families, and their pets from bites. It's also important to keep the bat so that it can be tested. With the warm weather, ECDOH expects to see a significant increase of potential rabies exposures from wildlife bites."

The ECDOH Rabies, Disease and Vector Control Program reports an increase in the number of potential rabies bite reports it has received this year, with 44 specimens being submitted for testing in May 2012; this more than doubles the number submitted for testing in April. Of the nearly one dozen confirmed cases of rabies through May 31, six are raccoons; two are bats.

If you are bitten by a bat, or if you come into contact with infectious material (such as saliva) from a potentially rabid animal, immediately wash the area with soap and water and call your doctor or the Erie County Health Department at (716) 961-6800. Bats have small teeth that may leave marks that are difficult to see. If a bat is found in the room of a sleeping person or in the room of a child or near a mentally impaired or intoxicated person, medical advice should be sought even if bite marks are not observed. **The bat should be captured whenever possible, ensuring that the head remains intact, so ECDOH can submit the bat for rabies testing.**

**Burstein added,** “Warmer weather leads to increased animal activity, so it’s a good idea for parents and caregivers to teach their children to never handle wildlife and animals that they do not know; to keep family pets’ rabies vaccinations current; to call animal control to remove stray animals from your neighborhood; and to ‘bat proof’ homes and living spaces as much as possible. We all need to be vigilant and proactive in the fight against rabies.”

“Bat proofing” a home or residence begins with a careful inspection for holes by the homeowner. Any openings larger than a quarter inch by a half inch should be filled in with caulk; this includes electrical and plumbing holes. Homeowners should use window screens, chimney caps and draft-guards beneath doors to attics. Watch for where the bats exit at dusk and stop them from returning by loosely hanging a piece of clear plastic or bird netting over these areas. Bats can crawl out and leave, but cannot re-enter. After all of the bats are out of the opening, permanently close the holes.

- For more information on rabies, visit [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/rabies](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/rabies)
- For information on ECDOH rabies programs, including how to safely capture a bat in your home, visit <http://www2.erie.gov/health/index.php?q=rabies-information> or call (716) 961-6800
- If contact is made with a bat after regular business hours, call (716) 961-7898

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