

MEDIA RELEASE

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Wildlife Encounters on the Rise in Chatham-Kent: Help Prevent Rabies Exposure

Chatham-Kent Public Health is reminding residents to avoid direct contact with wildlife following an increase in preventable encounters with bats and raccoons in the community. These incidents have resulted in a growing number of individuals requiring Rabies Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP), a series of treatments administered after a potential rabies exposure.

Rabies is a serious viral disease that affects the nervous system and is almost always fatal once symptoms appear. While cases of human rabies are rare and treatable with timely medical intervention, avoiding contact with wildlife remains the best protection.

"Many of the recent wildlife encounters we've investigated were avoidable," said Joshua Standel, CK Public Health Healthy Environments Program Manager. "Even animals that appear healthy, friendly, injured, or orphaned can carry rabies. We encourage residents to admire wildlife from a distance and never attempt to touch, feed, or handle wild animals."

Bats and raccoons are among the wildlife species most commonly associated with rabies exposures in Ontario. Residents are reminded to take the following precautions:

- Never touch, handle, or feed wild animals.
- Keep a safe distance from bats, raccoons, and other wildlife.
- Teach children to avoid approaching or touching wild animals.
- Ensure pets are up to date on their rabies vaccinations.
- Seek assistance from trained animal control or wildlife professionals if an animal appears sick, injured, or abandoned.

Residents who have been bitten or scratched by a wild animal, or who have had direct contact with a bat, should immediately wash the affected area thoroughly with soap and water and seek medical attention as soon as possible. Potential exposures should also be reported to CK Public Health for assessment and follow-up.

"Protecting yourself and your family starts with keeping a respectful distance from wildlife," added Standel. "A simple decision not to touch a wild animal can help prevent the need for rabies treatment."

For more information about rabies prevention and what to do following a potential exposure, visit www.ckphu.com/rabies or contact Chatham-Kent Public Health at **519-352-7270**.

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