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MEMORANDUM

TO: Local Boards of Health

FROM: Catherine Brown, D.V.M., M.Sc., M.P.H.
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Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH)

DATE: July 13, 2016

SUBJECT: Bats and Rabies

As you may already be aware, calls to public health agencies regarding bats and potential exposures to bats, are on the rise at this time of year. This is because attics are the place in a house where bats usually choose to roost and raise their young. After a few hot summer days, an attic can become too warm for the bats, forcing them into people's living quarters as they search for cooler places to roost. In addition, baby bats born earlier in the summer are getting old enough to start exploring on their own. Inexperienced young bats may fly down a chimney, through an open window, or down attic stairs. This may place them in proximity to or even in direct contact with, people.

Below are several important points to keep in mind when handling calls regarding bats.

- If a bat is found inside a house, **do not release the bat outdoors until you can safely rule out that an exposure, as described below, occurred.**
- Situations that should be investigated as potential exposures are: a person has had direct contact with a live animal and cannot rule out that a bite or scratch may have occurred; a sleeping person awaking to find a bat in the room; or, an adult witnesses a bat in the room with a previously unattended child, mentally disabled person, intoxicated person or domestic pet. Simply finding a bat inside a home does not, in itself, indicate that a potential exposure has occurred.

- If the bat is found to be rabid, or the bat is unavailable for testing, post exposure prophylaxis (PEP) should be considered.
- Decisions about exposures and the need for PEP should be made in consultation with a healthcare provider or public health. Encourage your Animal Inspectors and Animal Control Officers to refer questions about exposure to appropriate resources. The MDPH has developed a two-sided business card for ACOs to hand out directing people to the right place. These cards can be order free of charge at <http://www.maclearinghouse.com/RAB/RB4001.html>.
- Owners are legally required to keep their pet dogs and cats up-to-date on their rabies vaccinations. Currently vaccinated dogs and cats exposed to bats that are unavailable for testing, may need to receive a booster shot and/or be quarantined. Unvaccinated animals exposed to bats unavailable for testing pose a significant risk to other animals and people and may need to be quarantined for a prolonged period or occasionally even euthanized, at the owner's expense. Questions about domestic animals exposed to bats should be directed to the Department of Agricultural Resources, Division of Animal Health at 617-626-1810.
- When necessary, bats should be safely captured using the following technique and while wearing thick leather gloves. Wait until the bat lands, cover the bat with a coffee can (or similar container), and slide cardboard under the container to trap the bat inside. Avoid doing anything that might crush the bat's skull and make it unsuitable for testing. **Never handle a bat with bare hands.** Information on capturing a bat is available at <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/dph/cdc/rabies/bat-capturing.pdf>.
- When it is necessary to submit a bat for testing to the Massachusetts State Public Health Laboratory (MASPHL), it is imperative that packaging and shipping guidelines are followed to reduce the likelihood of an unsatisfactory result (due to decomposition), when the specimen must be shipped. Instructions for OVERNIGHT shipping of specimens for rabies testing can be found here: <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/dph/laboratory-sciences/rabies-submission-form-instructions.pdf> and the specimen submission form which must be included with the specimen can be found here: <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/dph/laboratory-sciences/rabies-submission-form.pdf> . **Please share this information with your Animal Inspector and Animal Control Officer(s).**

If you have questions about potential rabies exposures or how to submit a bat to MDPH for rabies testing, please call the MDPH, Division of Epidemiology and Immunization at (617) 983-6800. For additional information on rabies, you may also visit the website at www.mass.gov/dph/rabies.