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MEMORANDUM

TO: Local Boards of Health

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

DATE: June 25, 2018

SUBJECT: Bats and Rabies

As you may already be aware, calls to public health agencies regarding bats and potential human and domestic pet exposures to bats are on the rise during the summer months. The majority of these potential exposures occur in August. 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 close proximity to or even in direct contact with people.

Below are several important points to keep in mind when handling resident concerns regarding bat situations. We urge you to share this information with your Animal Inspector, Animal Control Officer (s) and First Responders.

- If a bat is found inside a house, do not release the bat outdoors until you can safely rule out that an exposure occurred. If an exposure is identified, residents, local Animal Inspectors, local boards of health, and possibly Animal Control Officers, should work together to facilitate submission of the bat for rabies testing. Simply finding a bat inside a home does not, in itself, indicate that a potential exposure has occurred. Exposures may have occurred for persons who were in the same room as a bat and who might be unaware that a bite or

direct contact had occurred (e.g., a sleeping person awakens to find a bat in the room or an adult witnesses a bat in the room with a previously unattended child, mentally disabled person, or intoxicated person) . Other household members would not be considered to be exposed.

- 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 on MDPH's website.
- When it is necessary to submit a bat for testing to the Massachusetts State Public Health Laboratory (MA SPHL), the bat can be dropped off at, or shipped overnight to, MA SPHL located at 305 South Street, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130. All animals **must** be euthanized prior to submission. If the specimen is shipped, it is imperative that packaging and shipping guidelines are followed to reduce the likelihood of an unsatisfactory result (due to decomposition). Instructions for OVERNIGHT [shipping of specimens](#) and the [specimen submission form](#) are available.
- If the bat is found to be rabid, or is unavailable for testing, post exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is recommended for individuals with exposures (as defined above) to the bat.
- Decisions about exposures and the need for PEP should be made in consultation with a healthcare provider or public health. Animal Inspectors, Animal Control Officers and First Responders should refer questions about human exposures to bats (and other wildlife) to the MDPH 24/7 Epidemiology Line at (617) 983-6800.
- 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 rabid or unavailable for testing, may need to receive a booster shot and/or be quarantined. Unvaccinated animals exposed to bats that are rabid or 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.

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 24/7 line at (617) 983-6800. For additional information on rabies, you may also visit the website at www.mass.gov/dph/rabies.