

Rabies rare but still a threat

By Rich Perlberg
staff writer

Animals in the wild and unvaccinated pets pose the greatest rabies threats to Oakland County residents, according to a county health official.

And while there has been no local rabies outbreak such as the one that is causing concern in Michigan's Thumb, every year there are a few rabid bats found in Oakland County, according to Joel Blotstein, epidemiologist for the county health department.

"That doesn't mean that only bats have rabies," he cautioned. "What that means is that the virus is there, and there is a potential for cross-over. There's always concern."

RABIES IS a rare but fatal disease in humans. The last documented Michigan case was a Hillsdale County child who died in 1983, possibly after being bitten by a rabid bat.

Published reports last weekend told of concern in Tuscola County where rabies has been detected in animals such as foxes and cats.

Blotstein said rabid bats in Oakland County have been detected in each of the last several years, usually after the bats bit another animal or a human. Raccoons and skunks are also potential rabies carriers, he said.

He said the presence of rabies in bats underscores the warnings against handling animals in the wild and should reinforce the need to vaccinate family pets against rabies.

Rabies vaccinations are part of the licensing process required by law for all Michigan dog owners. No such law applies to cats, but Blotstein said rabies vaccinations are still recommended.

Depending on the type of vaccine, a rabies vaccination is good for from one to three years, he said. A problem arises in that some pet owners

are lax about vaccinations, whether or not the law requires them.

HUMANS BITTEN by rabid animals need immediate vaccination to prevent the fatal virus from taking hold. That vaccination is no longer the long, painful process of years past but is "more like a tetanus shot" in the upper arm, said

Blotstein.

"But it's a very expensive treatment — \$200 to \$400," he said. "Prevention is far more cost effective and far less trying for the individual on an emotional level."

The keys to prevention, he repeated, are to avoid all contact with animals in the wild and to vaccinate all domestic animals.

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The excellence award was conceived by the OCC Foundation Board of Directors, which has been actively seeking the community's support to assist and recognize students for excellence achieved in their studies.

The award will cover tuition and fees for a full-time student for the fall, winter and spring semesters (one full school year).

Eligibility is based on a student's grade point average (GPA) times the total number of OCC completed credit hours of study, up to a maximum of 30 hours. Students with the

highest grand total will be considered first for the award.

Students may apply for the excellence award by completing a campus scholarship application available from any OCC campus financial aid office.

Currently, the excellence award is the only scholarship of its size available, but the OCC Foundation is seeking further gifts in an effort to establish additional excellence awards.

A major objective at OCC is to offer educational opportunity to a population with great diversity in living standards and educational levels.

Individuals and organizations interested in the work of the OCC Foundation and the establishment of excellence awards may contact Susan Wells, executive director of the OCC Foundation, at 540-1803.

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