Rabies is a highly infectious but preventable viral disease that affects all mammals and is most often transmitted through a bite of a rabid animal. The vast majority of rabies cases reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) occur in wild animals like raccoons, skunks, bats, and foxes. Each year Mississippi identifies bats with rabies but has only identified one case of land animal rabies in the state since 1961. Once symptoms of the disease develop, rabies is nearly always fatal, so prevention is of key importance.

All mammals are susceptible to rabies, but only a few species are significant reservoirs for the disease. These include domestic animals such as cats and dogs as well as wild animals such as raccoons, skunks, bats, foxes, and coyotes. Bats are of the greatest concern in Mississippi. Any exposure to a bat, even if no clear evidence of a bite is found, is considered a high risk exposure to potential rabies.

MANAGING PATIENTS WITH ANIMAL BITE:
Rodents (mice, squirrels, chipmunks, etc.) are not known to be reservoirs of Rabies in our region. The Health Department can help assess the risk of Rabies exposure depending on the type of animal and the animal’s condition. If Rabies post-exposure treatment is indicated, the hospital (or clinic) is responsible for providing the treatment. The Health Dept. serves an advisory role in the process.

For more information about Rabies: http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/ or http://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/_static/14,0,142.html

For expert consultation on how to manage a patient with animal bite, call (601) 576-7725
After-hours, call (601) 576-7400