



P. O. Box 850 • Caldwell, ID 83606 • (208) 455-5300 • FAX (208) 454-7722

News Release

September 20, 2012

MEDIA CONTACT:

Laurie Boston
(208) 455-5325
(208) 899-1268 cell
laurie.boston@phd3.idaho.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HEALTH OFFICIALS WARN TO AVOID BATS

Reports of unusual daylight bat activity in combination with increased numbers of bats testing positive for rabies in Southwest Idaho, cause health officials from Southwest District Health to issue a warning to avoid contacts with bats due to the potential risk of rabies and make sure household pets are current with their rabies vaccinations. With the hunting season quickly approaching, hunters should particularly take heed.

Rabies is a preventable, infectious, viral disease that affects the nervous system of humans as well as other wild and domestic animals, including dogs, cats, and horses. It can be fatal if left untreated. It is often transmitted through the bite of a rabid animal. The vast majority of rabies cases reported each year occur in wild animals like bats, raccoons, skunks, coyotes, and fox. It is also possible, but quite rare, for people to acquire rabies when saliva or other infectious material from a rabid animal directly contacts their eyes, nose, mouth, or a wound. Bats are the only animal in Idaho known to naturally carry the virus.

“Although most bats are harmless and do not carry rabies, it is best to avoid them if possible. Any bat that exhibits unusual behavior such as being active during the day, unable to fly, or in a place where bats are not usually seen, is more likely to have rabies,” said David Loper, Director Environmental Health Services for Southwest District Health. “Rabies can only be confirmed in a laboratory, but your awareness of this activity is very important,” he said.

Nationally, the Centers for Disease Control and prevention (CDC) are reporting higher number of rabid animals this year.

Loper cautioned anyone who is bitten or scratched by a bat should wash the affected area thoroughly with soap and water and seek immediate medical treatment. Anyone who awakens to a bat in their sleeping area should also consider themselves potentially exposed. In turn, if you know your pet has been bitten or exposed to a bat, contact your veterinarian. Whenever, possible, the bat should be captured and sent to a public health laboratory to be tested to rule out an exposure to rabies.

“If you or your pet encounters a bat, never touch the bat,” warns Loper. “You may contact Southwest District Health at 455-5400 for instructions on how to properly enclose the bat for testing,” he said.

-MORE-

To protect yourself and your pets, Southwest District Health offers the following tips:

- Do not touch a bat with your bare hands.
- Wash any wound from an animal thoroughly with soap and water and seek medical attention immediately.
- Have all dead, sick, or easily captured bats tested for rabies if exposure to people or pets occurs. For instructions on how to properly handle and package a bat for testing, call Southwest District Health at 455-5400. REMEMBER: Don't touch the bat!
- Be a responsible pet owner by keeping vaccinations current for all dogs, cats, ferrets, and horses. Pets may encounter bats outdoors or in the home. This is important not only to keep your pets from getting rabies, but also to provide a barrier of protection for you and your family, if your animal is bitten by a rabid wild animal.
- If possible, keep your pets under direct supervision so they do not come in contact with wild animals. If your pet is bitten by a wild animal, seek veterinary assistance for the animal immediately, whether or not their vaccinations are current.
- Avoid direct contact with unfamiliar animals. Do not handle, feed, or unintentionally attract wild animals with open garbage cans or litter. Call animal control to remove stray animals from your neighborhood. They may be unvaccinated and could be infected by the disease.
- Teach children never to handle unfamiliar animals, wild or domestic, even if they appear friendly. "love your own, leave other animals alone" is a good principle for children to learn.
- If you or your child awakes in the presence of a bat, discuss the situation with your medical provider. Bats have small teeth and people are sometimes bitten in their sleep without feeling it. The bat should be tested for rabies if there is any question that an exposure may have occurred.
- Bat-proof your home or cabin by checking chimneys, plugging any holes in siding, and maintaining tight-fitting screens on windows and doors. Bats can enter through holes the size of a quarter.

For further information about bats and instructions on how to properly handle and package a bat for testing, call your Southwest District Health at 455-5400. Information on rabies can also be found at the following Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website: www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/rabies/.

###

#2013-08