



DAVIS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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News Release

Exposure To Rabid Bats Increases During Migration

(Farmington, Utah) – With bat migration season currently taking place, Davis County health officials are looking to parents to get the word out about how to prevent human exposure to rabies. According to Lewis Garrett, director of the Davis County Health Department, “The message is simple. Tell your children ‘Don’t touch bats – dead or alive’.”

“Back in 2007, we had exposures to rabid bats at or near two local schools’ properties within a two week period,” he said. “This year, four elementary-aged Davis County students have been exposed to a bat that could not be tested.”

“Unfortunately, whenever bats aren’t able to be recovered or are too decomposed for testing, we don’t know if they carried rabies,” he said. “Based upon the individual circumstances, the Davis County Health Department’s staff errs on the side of caution by recommending to the attending health care providers that their patients be treated with post-exposure vaccine because the disease is virtually 100 percent fatal.”

Garrett said, “Our follow-up investigations always look at the likelihood of someone’s exposure to a rabid animal’s body fluids to determine if the rabies vaccine is needed.”

“To remind others of the danger from rabies, adults and children must understand that these and other wild animals shouldn’t be approached or handled for any reason,” said Garrett.

– MORE –

Page 2 of 2 – Exposure To Rabid Bats Increases During Migration

Rabies is a disease of the nervous system caused by a virus – usually the result of a bite, a scratch, or other contact with a rabid animal. Rabies is spread when the virus in an animal’s saliva, or other body fluid, enters a person’s open cuts, wounds, mouth, or eyes. The chance rabies will occur depends on the type of contact or exposure.

Parents need to explain to their younger children, as well as teenagers, about the dangers of playing with or touching wild animals that could carry rabies, Garrett stressed. “I’m very concerned when people put themselves in situations with potentially rabid bats requiring a precautionary series of shots to prevent a possible rabies infection.”

Brian Hatch, the county health department’s Epidemiologist, said, “Late August through September is both bat migration season and time for students to head back to school. With bats and kids on the move, the likelihood that they may cross paths is greater.” This is the same time period each year that we routinely see additional bat exposures, he said.

“If a wild animal – especially a bat – is found near places frequented by humans, there’s an increased chance that the animal is confused and disoriented because it has rabies,” said Hatch. “Wild animals usually don’t want to be around humans. That type of behavior makes us much more suspicious that the animal is infected with rabies.”

Other signs that an animal has rabies include irritable, restless, and nervous behavior, he said. “Some rabid animals don’t show any signs of the disease even though they’re highly contagious,” Hatch said. “Because of that, we want to warn everybody – particularly children – that if you see a bat, leave it alone. Don’t touch it.”

“We ask the public to quickly report strange behavior in wild animals and pets by calling Davis County Animal Care & Control’s dispatch at (801) 444-2200,” said Hatch. “We’d rather have their professionally trained and equipped staff humanely capture the animal than have the public be exposed to a potentially rabid animal.”

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