

NEWS

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CDHD reminds public to not handle bats and other wildlife *Parents urged to talk to their kids about the potential dangers*

Public health officials are urging people who encounter bats and other wildlife to avoid contact. Parents are encouraged to talk to their children about the risks of playing with or touching wildlife. While most bats do not have rabies, it is best to not touch wildlife.

It is common this time of year for public health officials to see an increase in calls and concerns from the public about bat exposure. Recent calls have included instances where children reportedly played with or touched a potentially sick bat. "Calls like these are especially concerning when multiple people may have interacted with a bat in a public space and the bat was not captured for testing," said Dr. Sarah Correll, Epidemiologist with Central District Health Department.

Tips to talk to children about not interacting with bats/wildlife:

- Teach your children never to touch or handle bats, even dead ones. Encourage your children to tell an adult if they find a bat at home, school, or with a pet.
- If you suspect your child has touched a bat, talk to your child gently to gather as much information as possible about the interaction. Contact your health care provider or health department to determine the potential for rabies exposure.
- Teach children not to feed or pet wildlife, even if they look sick or hurt.

Bites are the primary way rabies is transmitted. Waking up in the same room as a bat without a clear idea of whether a bite or direct contact occurred can also potentially put people and pets at risk for rabies infection. If you believe rabies exposure may have occurred, specific steps should be followed to collect a bat for testing. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game has produced a video on the safe capture of a bat: <https://idfg.idaho.gov/blog/2017/06/i-found-bat-my-home-what-do-i-do>

Without timely medical treatment, rabies infection is almost always fatal in people and animals. Medical therapy given to people soon after a possible rabies exposure is extremely effective in preventing rabies. If you or anyone in your family has been exposed to a bat you should wash the area with soap and water and contact your health care provider or health department to determine the potential for rabies exposure.

To protect yourself and your pets, CDHD offers the following tips:

- Never touch a bat with your bare hands;
- If you have been bitten, scratched, or come into other direct contact with a bat, seek medical attention;
- Safe capture and testing of a bat is recommended when known direct contact was made and in situations where a person lacks absolute certainty that a bite, scratch, or exposure to

mouth or eyes (mucous membranes) did not occur. Safely capture the bat and put it in a container (with air holes) without touching it, and contact your district health department to arrange for rabies testing. Whenever possible, the bat should be tested to rule out an exposure to rabies; (see Idaho Fish and Game [video](#) for steps on safe capture)

- Always vaccinate your pets for rabies, including horses. Pets may encounter bats outdoors or in the home; and
- Keep bats out of your home by preventing spaces where bats can get in and by maintaining tight-fitting screens on windows. If you have a bat colony in your home, contact the Idaho Department of Fish and Game for guidance on how to safely evict the bats.
- Leave bats alone. If you find a bat roosting (hanging with its head below its feet on any surface, including window screens, siding, trees, under an eave, over a door, etc.), leave the bat alone. It is resting or sleeping and will only use this area temporarily.

Bat Behavior

According to wildlife officials, when a bat begins to show signs of rabies, it becomes lethargic, loses its appetite, and often ends up grounded because it can no longer fly or feed. Wildlife experts remind people that bats are gentle animals by nature and do not attack people. However, when people attempt to pick them up, like any wild animal, they may act defensively. Young bats learning to fly or any bat during migration can often turn up in unexpected places, such as on the ground, from weakness or inexperience. While bats are most active at night, bat activity during the day does not necessarily mean the animal is sick or rabid, particularly during the late summer and early fall months when bats are migrating.

Rabid Bats this Season

In Idaho, rabid bats are typically reported between March and November. To-date this year, four bats have tested positive for rabies in Idaho; one in Ada County, one in Boise County and two in Bannock County. Last year, 15 bats tested positive for rabies statewide.

Resources:

- Rabies Education for Kids: www.cdc.gov/rabiesandkids/
- Bats and Rabies: www.cdc.gov/rabies.
- Track the number and location of rabid bats in Idaho: <http://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/Health/DiseasesConditions/RabiesInformation/tabid/176/Default.aspx>
- How to safely capture a bat for testing: <https://idfg.idaho.gov/blog/2017/06/i-found-bat-my-home-what-do-i-do>

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