



HILL COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

July 3, 2024

Press Release

Re: Rabies Positive Bat

Hill County Health Department was notified of a bat that tested positive for rabies on 7/2/2024. This bat had no known human exposure. This is a great reminder for everyone to not touch wild animals, and that skunks and bats carry the highest risk of exposing people to rabies in Hill County.

Rabies is a fatal, but preventable, disease. The rabies virus is carried in the saliva of infected warm-blooded mammals and is usually transmitted to people and other animals through a bite. Post-exposure prophylaxis, a series of injections administered after exposure, has a 100% success rate in preventing rabies infection. The use of post-exposure prophylaxis has dropped the human rabies death rate dramatically since the turn of the century. Human rabies deaths in the United States are rare, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and average approximately one to two deaths per year since the 1990's. The last human death in Montana attributed to rabies occurred in 1997.

All exposures to an animal capable of transmitting rabies should be assessed by the local health departments for risk of rabies transmission and a possible recommendation for post-exposure prophylaxis.

Follow these tips to reduce the risk of rabies exposure:

Do not feed or handle wild animals, especially bats. Bats are a substantial rabies concern in Montana because a bite may not be noticeable. Teach children never to touch wild animals or handle bats, even dead ones. Ask children to tell an adult if they see or find a bat. Do not allow children to bring bats or other wild animals to school for “Show and Tell.”

Avoid animal bites from domestic or feral animals. Teach children to never approach an unfamiliar animal and to always ask an owner's permission prior to petting an animal. Attempting to rescue a feral animal is also a common source of bite exposure. Sick or injured animals can become aggressive when someone attempts to handle them.

Vaccinate dogs and cats against rabies. Cats are especially susceptible to rabies exposure because they tend to have more contact with bats and wild animals than dogs do. All dogs and cats should have a current rabies certificate. Work with your local veterinarian on rabies prevention in domestic animals and report any potential rabies exposures. Rabies vaccination of animals can prevent rabies transmission to humans.

Bat-proof your house. Bats must not be allowed in living areas of your home. Put screens on all windows, doors, and chimneys to prevent bats from entering. You can prevent bats from roosting in attics or buildings by covering outside entry points with loosely hanging clear plastic sheeting or bird netting. Bats can crawl out and leave the house but cannot re-enter. To avoid trapping any young bats who will die or try to make their way into your rooms, seal the openings permanently in the fall after bats have left for the season.

Watch for abnormal animal behavior. Most wild animals avoid humans and seeing skunks and bats during the daytime is rare. If you see an animal acting strangely, leave it alone and contact law enforcement, an animal control agency, or your local Fish, Wildlife & Parks office if you think it may pose a danger. There are many animal diseases that could cause animals to act differently, including rabies, distemper, and avian influenza; it's best to let animal experts assess an animal that is sick.

Any bat that has physical contact with a person, or a bat that is found in an area where undetected contact may have occurred, such as a bedroom with a sleeping adult or child, should be tested for rabies. Do not damage the head of the bat, because the brain is needed for the rabies test.

If you or your child has any contact with a bat, you find a bat in your home, or you are bitten or scratched by any wild or stray animal, contact your health care provider for appropriate medical follow-up.

It is not recommended to routinely test bats that do not have a possible human exposure, however if you need guidance on how to safely collect a bat that is involved in a human exposure for testing, please contact the Hill County Health Department department at 406-400-2415 and ask for William Cochran. For additional information on rabies may also visit our website at hillcountyhealth.com/environmental-health/.