

For Immediate Release

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Get Bats Tested after Potential Human Exposures

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) reminds you that a bat found in a room where someone has been sleeping or in the house with open bedroom doors should be carefully caught and tested for rabies. The State of Wyoming recently reported a human rabies death from a bat exposure that occurred in a bedroom.

“Bat bites are difficult to see and can be easily overlooked,” states Melissa Propp, RN, Surveillance Coordinator at SWNPHD. “If there is a chance that a bat could have been in a room with a sleeping person, young children or elderly, and they are not sure of contact, we would recommend testing the bat for rabies.”

“Rabies is a deadly virus infection that affects the nervous system of humans and other mammals,” explains Propp. People get rabies from the bite of an animal with rabies. Any wild mammal, like a raccoon, skunk, fox, coyote, or bat, can have rabies and transmit it to people. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), rabies is a medical emergency. Any wounds should be immediately washed and receive medical attention from a health care professional.

CDC offers this advice for capturing a bat:

1. Find a small container like a box or large can, and a piece of cardboard large enough to cover the opening in the container. Punch small air holes in the cardboard.
2. Put on leather work gloves, when the bat lands, approach it slowly and place the container over it. Slide the cardboard under the container to trap the bat inside.
3. If you are certain there’s been no contact between the bat and any people or pets, carefully hold the cardboard over the container and take the bat outdoors and release it away from people and pets.
4. If there’s any question about contact between the bat and people or pets, you want to save the bat for testing. Tape the cardboard to the containers, securing the bat inside and then contact your veterinarian and health department to have the bat tested for rabies.

CDC is adamant that bats must not be allowed into your home. They recommend “bat-proofing” your home.

- Carefully examine your home for holes that might allow bats entry into your living quarters.
- Caulk any openings larger than a quarter-inch by a half-inch.
- Use window screens, chimney caps and draft-guards beneath doors to attics, fill electrical and plumbing holes with stainless steel wool or caulking, and ensure that all doors to the outside close tightly.
- Prevent bats from roosting in attics or buildings by covering outside entry points.
- Avoid “bat-proofing” from May through August. If there are young bats in your attic, many of them can’t fly and keeping the adults out will trap the young who will die or try to make their way into your rooms.

- Most bats leave in the fall or winter to hibernate, so these are the best times to “bat-proof” your home.

In 2015, SWNPHD had 25% of the reported rabies cases in Nebraska.

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins and Red Willow counties. For more information call Melissa Propp, RN at 308-345-4223 or email nurse@swhealth.ne.gov . SWNPHD is located at 404 West 10th Street, McCook – one block north of Arby’s. You can also follow SWNPHD on Facebook.com/swnphd and Twitter@swpublichealth.

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