



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Idaho Public Health Districts

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July 2014

RABIES IN IDAHO

Summertime in Idaho is filled with many activities that take people outdoors. There are many things to consider when venturing out to parks and forests. Working to prevent bites from wild animals is just one of the many things you can do to help keep yourself and your family safe and healthy. Wild animals carry diseases, like rabies, that if left untreated, is almost always fatal.

Rabies is a viral disease of mammals. In the United States, 92% of rabies cases are in wild animals. Nationwide, raccoons account for most of the cases of rabies, followed by skunks, bats, and foxes. In Idaho, bats are the primary carriers of rabies. In 2013, 27 bats tested positive for rabies in Idaho. Due to public policies and a functioning veterinary system—that strongly encourages immunization of household pets—rabies in domesticated animals is very rare. Unfortunately, it is much more difficult to immunize wild mammals.

For this reason, any exposure to the saliva of a wild mammal, through a bite, scratch, or close encounter, is cause for a visit to a healthcare provider. Rabies prophylaxis (treatment to prevent infection or disease) consists of an initial injection of immune globulin (antibodies against the rabies virus) followed by four doses of rabies vaccine over two weeks. Timely treatment prevents the development of rabies.

While there are cases of rabies in wild animals in Idaho and throughout the United States, human cases are extremely rare, with only one or two cases being reported each year. This is because there is a robust public health system in place that responds swiftly to rabies exposures in humans. Local public health districts coordinate with animal control services and some even help to facilitate the retrieval of the suspect rabid animal and aid in the packaging and sending of the animal to the state laboratory in Boise for

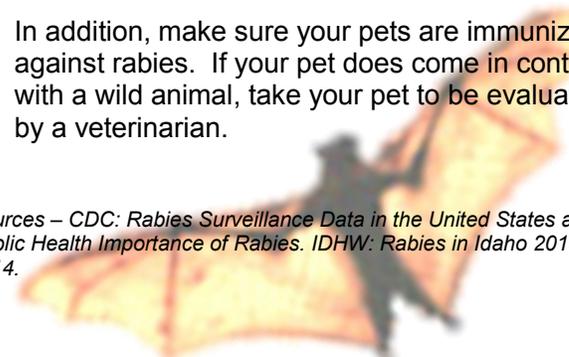
confirmatory testing. If rabies is confirmed, public health officials communicate this information to the healthcare provider treating the patient. They also work with the patient to identify other individuals who might have been exposed to the rabid animal so they can begin treatment themselves.

Public health officials also communicate this vital information to the general public. State and local public health officials work tirelessly on public awareness and education campaigns regarding the risks of animal bites and prevention strategies to reduce the risk of rabies exposure.

So, as you head out this summer to enjoy the great outdoors, make sure to do the following:

- Don't pet, feed, or handle wildlife, even if they look dead. Keep a safe distance from wildlife, especially animals that are acting strangely. This includes night time animals out in the day or animals that approach you without fear when they would normally run away from you.
- If a wild animal bites you, wash the wound with soap and water immediately and consult with a healthcare provider as soon as possible. If you encounter a bat in your sleeping quarters, even if you do not feel bitten, also consult with a healthcare provider as soon as possible.
- In addition, make sure your pets are immunized against rabies. If your pet does come in contact with a wild animal, take your pet to be evaluated by a veterinarian.

Sources – CDC: *Rabies Surveillance Data in the United States and Public Health Importance of Rabies*. IDHW: *Rabies in Idaho 2013 & 2014*.



HEALTHY PEOPLE IN HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

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