



Public Health
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Idaho Public Health Districts

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July / August 2016

Summer Brings Warm Weather, Recreation and Public Health Headlines



It's summertime, and that means Idahoans are enjoying the abundance of outdoor activities that our state has to offer.

But it's also the time of year when the

not-so-sunny subjects like Recreational Water Illness, West Nile Virus, rabies and plague find their way into the news headlines. While not all summer health issues are reportable diseases, Idaho's Local Health Departments (LHDs) tend to see an increase in outbreaks and calls from the public this time of year. The good news is that with some simple precautions, everyone can still have a great time and stay healthy while playing it safe.

Rabies

In Idaho, bats are the natural reservoir for rabies, and bites are the primary means of transmission. Last year, 10 bats in Idaho tested positive for rabies, which is virtually 100 percent fatal in people and animals without timely medical intervention. So far this season, five bats across the state have tested positive for rabies. As a reminder, it's important for people to not touch bats or allow their pets to have contact, but rather contact animal control. To prevent rabies, ensure that pets are up-to-date on vaccines, and teach kids to never touch or play with wild animals, whether they are dead or alive.

West Nile Virus

In late June, Idaho's first West Nile-positive mosquitoes of the season were identified. Each year, evidence of West Nile Virus (WNV) is discovered throughout much of the state. WNV is transmitted to people, birds and other animals by the bite of an infected mosquito. This virus can cause serious illness in people of any age, but especially in people over the age of 50 or those with other underlying medical conditions. You can protect yourself by avoiding mosquito bites.

- Wear repellent containing DEET, Picaridin or Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus (all EPA-approved repellents)
- Remove standing water around your home — this is where mosquitoes like to breed

- Cover your skin with clothing between dusk and dawn, when mosquitoes are most active, and
- Track positive WNV mosquitos in your area or where you're recreating, at www.westnile.idaho.gov

Plague

Plague is transmitted by the bites of infected fleas, or through direct contact with an infected animal, including pets, and has caused die offs of ground squirrels in Ada and Elmore counties this season. It is important to remember that plague can be found throughout Idaho, anywhere there are ground squirrels. Five cases in Idaho have been reported since 1925, each from different counties. Gem (1940), Lemhi (1968), Ada (1987), Bingham (1991) and Owyhee (1992) counties have each had human cases with a case-fatality rate of 60%. Plague can infect both humans and pets, and can be a life-threatening illness. Since late May, at least six pet cats in southern Idaho have tested positive. Three of the six cats died.

The threat of plague typically drops in early July when the ground squirrels retreat into their burrows. Public health officials urge people, particularly between May and July when ground squirrels are active above ground, to avoid contact with the rodents, and to prevent their pets from having contact. Those recreating in areas known to have grounds squirrels should also take precautions by wearing long sleeved shirts, pants, boots, using bug spray containing DEET, and making sure their pets are treated with flea control.

Recreational Water Illness

Recreational Water Illnesses (RWIs) are caused by germs and chemicals found in the water we swim in. They are spread by swallowing, breathing in mists or aerosols of, or having contact with contaminated water in virtually any type of water — from swimming pools to rivers and oceans.

RWIs can be a wide variety of infections, including gastrointestinal, skin, ear, respiratory, eye, neurologic and wound infections. The most commonly reported RWI is diarrhea.

- **Check the pool** – Remember, not all pools are inspected by your local health department.
- **Check yourself** – Keep body fluids and dirt out of the water. Stay out if you have diarrhea, an open wound, and shower before and after you go in the water.

Giving your summer activities some forethought and always keeping safety in mind can go a long way in preventing you, your family or pets from becoming a summertime statistic.

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