



LEWIS & CLARK CITY-COUNTY
Health Department

1930 Ninth Avenue
Helena, MT 59601
PH: 406.4HEALTH or 406.443.2584
Fax: 406.457.8990

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Laurel Riek, Environmental Health Specialist, 406-447-8361
Gayle Shirley, Communications Coordinator, 406-457-8908

Rabid Bat Found at Holter Lake, Campers May Have Been Exposed

A bat captured at the Holter Lake Campground over the Father's Day weekend has tested positive for rabies, the Lewis and Clark City-County Health Department reported Friday.

"We are concerned for anyone who came into direct contact with the bat," said Laurel Riek, environmental health specialist with the department.

"Bat bites are small and not always easy to detect," Riek said. "Campers may have to consider rabies treatment if there's a reasonable probability of exposure. This could include sleeping out in the open at the campground. Parents should ask their children if they touched or played with a bat while they were there."

Rabies is transmitted through infected saliva via a bite, scratch or other break in the skin. The disease is almost always fatal if untreated. Treatment involves a series of vaccinations that should begin as soon as possible after exposure.

Direct contact would include bites, scratches or saliva contact with eyes, nose, mouth, or an open break in the skin. There is a reasonable probability of exposure if:

- A child is found handling a bat or reports that they handled a bat.
- An adult sees a bat fly near a child and the child reports that "it hit me."
- A person steps on a bat with bare feet.
- A bat flies into someone and touches bare skin.
- A person sleeps out in the open where a rabid bat has been found.

There is little probability of exposure when:

- Touching fur, wings, or legs of a live bat while looking at it.
- Touching something that a bat has touched.
- A bat brushes past someone, but they're certain no contact occurred.

Anyone who was at the Holter Lake Campground between June 1 and 16 and who had direct contact with a bat should call the health department at 447-8361. During the weekend, call 459-1322.

People who had no direct contact with a bat are not at risk, Riek said.

A camper caught the bat in a towel because it was acting strangely.

“It was flying around during the day and seemed unafraid of people,” Riek said. “That’s not normal bat behavior.”

The camper turned the bat over to the campground host. A volunteer brought it to the health department, which sent it to the State Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory in Bozeman for testing. Positive results were received late Thursday.

“It’s extremely important to act if you’ve been exposed to a bat,” Riek said. “Don’t wait to see whether you have symptoms.”

“We strongly recommend that people do not touch any wild animal. They should report animals displaying odd behavior to a proper authority,” she added.

Early symptoms of rabies in humans include fever, headache, and general malaise. As the disease progresses, symptoms may include insomnia, anxiety, confusion, slight or partial paralysis, hallucinations, agitation, excessive salivation, and difficulty swallowing. Death usually occurs within days of the onset of symptoms.

Here are some ways to protect yourself and your family from being exposed to rabies:

- Never touch a bat. Teach children never to handle unfamiliar animals, wild or domestic, even if they appear friendly.
- Wash any wound from an animal thoroughly with soap and water and seek medical attention immediately.
- Keep wild animals out of your home. Secure doors and windows, cap chimneys with screens, and close off any openings in porches, basements, and attics.
- Make sure your pets are current on their rabies shots. An unvaccinated pet that’s exposed to a rabid animal could become a threat to your family.
- Confine your animals to your property. Pets that are allowed to roam are at higher risk for rabies exposure and infection.

For more information on bats and rabies, visit the Health Department website at www.LewisAndClarkHealth.org.

The Lewis & Clark City-County Health Department’s mission is to improve and protect the health of all Lewis & Clark County residents.

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