FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Aug. 25, 2017
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Rabid Bat Bites Recreationist Near Helena

A person recreating at Canyon Ferry Lake was bitten this week by a bat that tested positive for rabies, local health officials announced today. The individual is undergoing treatment to prevent rabies.

The incident has prompted Lewis and Clark Public Health (LCPH) to issue a reminder of the risk of possible rabies exposure from bats. As of Aug. 22, there have been seven rabid bats identified throughout the state.

“Anyone who had direct contact with a bat needs to be evaluated for potential exposure to rabies,” said Laurel Riek, environmental health specialist with LCPH.

Direct contact includes being bitten or scratched by a bat or getting bat saliva in the 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. (Parents should specifically ask their children about potential contact with live or dead bats.)
- 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.
- A bat is found in a room where a person might be unaware that direct contact has occurred, for example, if someone has been sleeping or is intoxicated, or if the person is a child or someone with a mental disability.

There is little probability of exposure when:

- Touching fur, wings, or legs of a bat while looking at it.
- Touching something that a bat has touched.
- A bat brushes past someone, but they’re certain they haven’t been bitten or scratched.

Rabies is almost always fatal if untreated. It’s transmitted through infected saliva via a bite, scratch, or other break in the skin. Treatment involves a series of vaccinations that should begin as soon as possible after exposure.
“Bat bites are small and not always easy to detect,” Riek said. “People may have to consider rabies treatment if there’s a reasonable probability of exposure. Parents should teach their children not to handle bats.”

She strongly recommended that people avoid touching any wild animal. Skunks, raccoons, and foxes also have been known to carry rabies.

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.