

For immediate release:

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State Confirms Rabid Bat in Rio Arriba County

Department of Health Reminds Public to Avoid Wild Animals

(Santa Fe) -- The New Mexico Department of Health reported today that a bat from Rio Arriba County tested positive for rabies. A man who picked up the bat from the ground was bitten and is receiving rabies vaccine to prevent him from developing rabies. The Department of Health reminds people to avoid wild animals to prevent the spread of disease to themselves and their families.

“This incident serves as a reminder to people that even if wild animals appear sick or dead on the ground they are still potentially dangerous and should be avoided,” said Paul Ettestad, the Department’s public health veterinarian. “In the United States, rabid bats cause the most rabies cases in people, a disease that is nearly 100% fatal if not treated before symptoms begin.”

Most bats don’t have rabies. According to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, only 6 percent of bats had rabies when they were submitted for rabies testing because they were captured, obviously weak or sick, or had been captured by a cat. However, any bat might be rabid if it is active by day or is found in a place where bats are not usually seen, like in your home or on the ground. A bat that is unable to fly and is easily approached could be sick.

Since pet dogs and cats that roam and hunt can come into contact with rabid animals and potentially transmit it to people, it is very important to make sure all dogs and cats are up-to-date on their rabies vaccinations. This will also help protect children and other family members from rabies if their dog or cat tangles with a rabid animal. Ettestad said even if pets only go outside occasionally they can be attacked by a rabid animal. Animals that are not vaccinated and are bitten by a rabid animal can be dangerous and expose people to rabies before they die.

Ettestad said it is easy to prevent rabies by taking the following precautions:

- Do not handle wild animals. Feed your pets indoors and do not toss table scraps into your yard.
- Teach your children to stay away from wild animals or animals they don’t know.

- If skunks or other wild animals are lurking around your yard and acting sick or abnormal, contact your local animal control department.
- Supervise your pets to prevent exposure. Obey leash laws and keep your pets restrained.
- If your pet is bitten by a wild animal or a stray domestic animal, contact your local animal control department and bring your pet to your veterinarian, even if the wound is superficial.

If you are bitten or scratched by a wild animal or a pet, the Department of Health recommends the following guidelines:

- Wash all wounds and contact areas thoroughly with soap and water.
- Contact your physician immediately for evaluation. The Department of Health is available to physicians for consultation about rabies at 505-827-0006.
- Call the local animal control department to report the incident; provide them with an accurate description of the animal.
- Try to keep the animal confined, but don't risk further injury if the animal is dangerous.
- Keep children away from all animals involved in the incident.

For more information about rabies in New Mexico, visit Department of Health's website: <http://www.health.state.nm.us/ERD/HealthData/rabies.shtml>.