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**NEWS RELEASE**

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**Blaine County Man Begins Treatment After Contact with Rabid Bat**

A Blaine County man encountered an aggressive bat last weekend while fishing in a tributary of the Wood River west of Hailey. The bat later tested positive for rabies. The man began medical treatment, which is highly effective against rabies exposure.

The man was fishing in the late afternoon when a bat began aggressively flying around him. The man thought the bat had left the area but decided to quit fishing and head home. Upon packing up his gear, he found the bat attached to his life vest. The man was able to contain the bat and called Idaho Fish and Game who picked the bat up. The bat was sent to the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare's Bureau of Laboratories in Boise for testing.

This bat is the first this year to test positive for rabies in South Central Public Health District and the second in the state. Every year rabid bats are reported, with eight bats testing positive for rabies last year in Idaho. Rabies can cause a fatal viral illness if people who are scratched or bitten do not receive the rabies vaccine.

"Bats and other mammals can carry rabies, making it extremely important for people to avoid bats or other animals, wild or domestic, that may appear sick or are acting aggressive or in an abnormal manner," says Dr. Leslie Tengelsen, Deputy State Epidemiologist. "People should not pick up or touch any bat. People should call their health care provider immediately if they have been bitten or scratched by a bat. Medical therapy administered to people soon after a possible rabies exposure is extremely effective in preventing rabies."

While most bats are harmless and do not carry rabies, they are the only animal in Idaho to naturally carry the virus. Most animals, including household pets, can become exposed to the virus by playing with sick bats that can no longer fly. Rabies is fatal to pets and other animals, too.

People usually come into contact with bats when a pet brings home a sick or dead bat, or when a bat enters the home through small openings or open windows. People who wake up from sleeping and find a bat in their room may have had an exposure without realizing it; the teeth of a bat are very small and people are sometimes bitten in their sleep without feeling it. The bat should be tested for rabies if there is any question that an exposure may have occurred.

**(more)**

In addition to rabid bats, over the last 20 years, several cats, a skunk, a bobcat and a horse were also infected with the bat strain of the rabies virus in Idaho.

To protect yourself and your pets, the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare offers the following tips:

- Do not touch a bat with your bare hands;
- If you have had an encounter with a bat, seek medical attention immediately;
- If you come in contact with a bat, save the bat in a container without touching it and contact your district health department to arrange testing for rabies. Whenever possible, the bat should be tested to rule out an exposure to rabies. There is no charge for this service;
- Always vaccinate your pets, including horses. Pets may encounter bats outdoors or in the home; and
- Bat-proof your home or cabin by plugging all holes in the siding and maintaining tight-fitting screens on windows.

For further information please call the District Health Department in your area. Information on rabies can be found at the following website: [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/rabies/](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/rabies/)

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**(Editors: For more information please contact Health and Welfare's Tom Shanahan, 334-0668, or your District Health Department Public Information Officer.)**