

Animal Health Update: Update on Rabid Bats in LA County
6.12.2019

Dear Colleagues,

Bats are the main reservoir species for the rabies virus in LA County, and the 2019 rabid bat season is underway. As of June 11th, a total of 9 rabid bats have been found so far in LA County this year. One of the rabid bats was found at a school, five were found outside of private residences, one was found outside of an apartment building, and two were found outside of businesses. For more information: <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/vet/rabiesmap2019.htm>

This total is almost twice as many as the 5 rabid bats found by this time in 2018, and also above the five-year median of 5 rabid bats typically found by this time. The number of rabid bats typically begins to increase in June, and usually hits a peak for the year in August. LA County also continues to have the highest number of bats testing positive for rabies of all counties in California each year. Approximately 38 rabid bats have been encountered each year in LA County since 2011.

Each year, about 15% of bats tested for rabies in LA County are positive for the virus. Bats are only tested for rabies if they are found near people or pets, or are showing unusual behavior such as flying in daylight, or staying in an exposed area for extended periods.

The rabies virus is primarily transmitted by the bite of a rabies infected animal. The incubation period in animals is variable, but typically lasts between 3 -12 weeks. The initial clinical signs of rabies are non-specific and may include loss of appetite, lethargy or respiratory or gastrointestinal signs. Over the period of days, neurologic signs begin to accumulate and may include seizures, restlessness, and increased biting, difficulty swallowing, loss of coordination, weakness or paralysis of the limbs, tongue, and jaw and an altered voice. Once an infected animal shows clinical signs, the disease is fatal.

Because bat bites are so small and can easily go unnoticed, especially in sleeping persons, encounters with bats are especially concerning for the transmission of rabies. Therefore, any human or pet who has contact with a bat should be further evaluated for rabies exposure risk.

Routine rabies vaccination of domestic animals continues to be the mainstay in rabies control and prevention.

Veterinarians should report all animal bites and bat encounters to VPH.

Veterinarians should educate pet owners to:

- 1) Keep dogs and cats (including indoor-only cats) up to date on their rabies vaccination.
- 2) Make sure windows are have tightly fitted screens so that bats cannot fly into buildings when windows are open.
- 3) If a bat is found indoors, an encounter with a pet or sleeping person may have occurred. It should not be released outdoors. Instead, it should be contained in one part of the house, and Animal Control should be contacted to collect the bat for rabies testing.

Additional information about bats and rabies may be found at:

<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/vet/rabies.htm>

For public health consultations or to report a disease: Call and ask to speak with the Veterinarian-On-Call at 213-989-7060 (M-F 8am-5pm), or email us at vet@ph.lacounty.gov.

Karen Ehnert, DVM, MPVM, DACVPM
Director, Veterinary Public Health
Los Angeles County Department of Public Health
313 N. Figueroa St, Room 1127
Los Angeles, CA 90012
(213) 288-7060
(213) 481-2375 Fax
kehnert@ph.lacounty.gov
<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/vet/>

To unsubscribe from the LAC-AHAN list, click the following link:

<https://listserv.ph.lacounty.gov/scripts/wa.exe?SUBED1=LAC-AHAN&A=1>