



For Immediate Release:

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Increase in Rabid Bats Found in LA County Prompts Concern

Make sure pets' vaccinations are up-to-date; do not touch wild animals

LOS ANGELES – With an unusually high number of rabid bats recorded in Los Angeles County so far this year, the Department of Public Health is reminding all residents to avoid touching any wild animals, especially bats. So far in 2010, 21 rabid bats have been detected countywide, compared to an average of 10 per year.

“The reason for the increase in the number of rabid bats reported in LA County is unclear. Regardless, it is important that all county residents understand the potential dangers posed to themselves and their pets as most of these rabid bats have been found in and around homes,” said Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH, Director of Public Health and Health Officer. “Make sure that children know to leave bats and other wildlife alone, and keep pets away from wild animals. If you see a sick bat or other sick animal, contact your local animal control agency.”

One person who was attempting to rehabilitate a sick bat was bitten. The bat tested positive for rabies and the individual was quickly treated for rabies exposure. Rabies is a serious viral disease that affects the central nervous system, ultimately causing brain disease and death. Symptoms may include fever, weakness, confusion, anxiety, partial paralysis and an increase in saliva. Rabies is transmitted through the bite or saliva of an infected animal. The majority of rabies cases reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) each year occur in wild animals such as bats, raccoons, skunks, and foxes.

“Rabies poses a serious threat to pets as well as people. So far this year, two dogs and a cat were found playing with live, rabid bats at their homes. Fortunately, the pets had current rabies vaccinations. If not, their owners would have had to face the difficult decision of either euthanizing their pet or putting them in quarantine for six months. All pet owners should make sure their dog or cat has an up-to-date vaccine against rabies,” said Dr. Fielding.

Dogs and cats with current vaccines that have come into contact with rabid animals may be revaccinated and kept in quarantine for 30 days to ensure they have not been infected by rabies. Bats are protected by federal law and are an important part of our ecosystem. In nature, about 1 in 1000 to 1 in 10,000 bats is infected with rabies. However when a sick bat is found, the risk of that bat having rabies is much higher; approximately 10 percent.

Individuals should take the following steps to reduce their rabies risk:

- Make sure pets are up-to-date on rabies vaccinations.
- If you are bitten by a wild animal, contact your doctor immediately to determine if you need rabies post-exposure treatment.
- Do not try to touch any wild animal, especially bats.



- If a bat is found on the ground around your home or in a public place, place a box or other container over it and call your local animal control agency.
- If a bat is found in your home and may have had access to pets or areas where people were sleeping, do not release it outside. If possible, put a small box or container over it and call your local animal control agency.
- If your pet has been found with a bat or other wild animals (except for rodents, rabbits or squirrels), report the exposure to the Department of Public Health Veterinary Public Health and Rabies Control Program by calling (213) 989-7060.

More information about rabies and rabid bats is available on the Public Health's website at <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/vet/rabies.htm>.

The Department of Public Health is committed to protecting and improving the health of the nearly 10 million residents of Los Angeles County. Through a variety of programs, community partnerships and services, Public Health oversees environmental health, disease control, and community and family health. Public Health comprises more than 4,000 employees and has an annual budget exceeding \$750 million. To learn more about Public Health and the work we do, please visit <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov>, visit our YouTube channel at <http://www.youtube.com/lapublichealth>, or follow us on Twitter: LAPublicHealth.

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