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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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People Urged to Take Precautions with Bats

A bat from southeast Idaho tested positive for rabies last week, prompting public health officials to warn people throughout the state to take precautions around bats and make sure that their dogs, cats, and horses are adequately vaccinated against rabies. This is the first report of a rabid bat in the State this summer.

Bats play an important role in our environment. While most bats are harmless and do not carry rabies, they are the only animal in Idaho to naturally carry the virus. In many other states, skunks, raccoons and foxes also frequently carry the virus. Every year, Idaho averages more than 15 rabid bat reports.

Rabies causes a fatal viral illness in humans and other animals. Most animals, including household pets, can become exposed to the virus by playing with sick bats that can no longer fly. This is why it is important for people to make sure that their animals are vaccinated against rabies.

“It is extremely important for people to avoid bats or other wild animals that may appear sick or are acting aggressively or abnormally,” says Dr. Leslie Tengelsen, Deputy State Epidemiologist. “People should call their health care provider immediately if they have been bitten or scratched by a bat. Medical therapy administered to people after an animal bite is extremely effective in preventing rabies.”

People usually come in contact with bats through a pet bringing home a sick or dead bat, or by a bat entering their homes 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.

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. This is a free 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 call the District Health Department in your area. Information on rabies can be found at the following website: www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/rabies/

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(Editors: For more information please contact Health and Welfare's Emily Simnitt, 334-0693, or your District Health Department Public Information Officer.)

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