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Protect yourself against rabies, report wild animal bites

SOUTH ZONE – Following two bat bite incidents reported in the South Zone in the last week alone, Alberta Health Services (AHS) is reminding residents and visitors to report all wild animal bites to their local public health office, or to Health Link. Wild mammals – such as bats, coyotes, raccoons and skunks – may be rabies carriers, and these health professionals should advise on necessary follow-up, after a bite.

Although household pets and indoor animals rarely get rabies (due to vaccination and lack of exposure), each year in Alberta a number of bats and other wild animals (including stray dogs and cats), do test positive for rabies.

To reduce your risk of contact with the rabies virus:

- vaccinate pets (including dogs, cats and ferrets) against rabies. If you aren't the first owner of your pet, ask for a certificate of rabies vaccination. If no document exists, confirm with the pet's veterinarian that the pet got the vaccine.
- avoid contact with stray dogs or cats, especially in rural areas where rabies is a risk.
- avoid contact with bats.
- never touch or try to pet or catch a wild or stray animal. Teach children to avoid these animals.
- secure garbage and other items that attract animals.
- secure open areas of your home, such as pet doors, chimneys, unscreened windows or any place that wild or stray animals could enter.
- never handle a dead animal without proper protection. Avoid any contact with its brain tissue.

If bitten or scratched, wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water, and contact your local public health office as soon as possible for advice. Alternatively, call Health Link, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by dialing 811.

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than four million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

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