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Taking proper precautions reduces the risk of exposure to rabies

Edmonton... Alberta Health and Wellness and Alberta Health Services are urging Albertans to report any wild animal bites to their physician since wild mammals such as bats, coyotes and skunks may be rabies carriers. Over the last five years, a number of bats have tested positive for rabies in Alberta.

Albertans should avoid any contact with wild animals, such as handling bats. If you see a bat in your home and you are sure no human or pet exposure has occurred, confine the bat to a room by closing all doors and windows leading out of the room except those to the outside. If the bat does not leave, it can be caught once it has landed, using the following precautions:

- Wear leather work gloves
- Trap the bat under a small box or coffee can
- Seal the bat in the can with a piece of cardboard
- Release the bat outdoors away from people and pets.

If bitten, wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water, and contact your local public health office for advice. If there is any uncertainty about exposure, presume a bite may have occurred. For example, if you awaken and find a bat in your room, or see a bat in the room of an unattended child, mentally impaired or intoxicated person, contact your local public health office as soon as possible. You can also call HEALTHLink Alberta at 1-866-408-LINK (5465).

Post-exposure treatment for individuals who have been bitten by a wild animal that may be rabid consists of an injection of rabies immune globulin right away for immediate protection and a series of five injections of rabies vaccine over 28 days.

In March 2007, a rare case of human rabies, a fatal neurological disease, was confirmed in Alberta. A man from East Central Alberta was bitten by a bat in the summer of 2006, and did not seek or receive post-exposure rabies treatment. The individual died in hospital. The symptoms are extreme anxiety, paralysis, difficulty swallowing, convulsions, and almost invariably death. It can be months after a bite before a person develops symptoms of rabies.

For more information, visit www.albertahealthservices.ca and search: Rabies.

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