## News from the Wyoming Department of Health

Thursday, August 3, 2006

## **Bat Incidents Lead to Rabies Concerns**

Following a few recent incidents, Wyoming Department of Health officials are warning Wyoming residents to be cautious if they encounter bats because of rabies concerns.

The department has been notified about the presence of bat colonies in and around a public building in the Cowley area that is frequently used for group gatherings. A bat was also found inside a Cheyenne church, and five bats tested positive for rabies in nearby Fort Collins, Colorado.

The department learned of the Cowley area situation because a person who attended a recent function at the building had direct exposure to a bat, which required preventive treatment for rabies.

"Bats are a major reservoir of rabies in Wyoming and can lead to infection of humans and animals," said Dr. Richard Luce, Centers for Disease Control field officer with the Wyoming Department of Health. "While bats can be beneficial for insect control, they do present a serious public health threat when they inhabit structures where humans live or congregate."

Rabies is nearly always a fatal disease in humans, but can be successfully prevented if treatment is started promptly after exposure.

"Transmission of rabies from bat to human may occur from bites, even if the bite is not recognized, as well as from scratches or other physical contact that result in a break in a person's skin or mucous membrane exposure," Luce said.

Luce, who is a veterinarian, said preventive treatment may be considered in the following situations:

- \*Physical contact with or handling a bat even if bite marks are not seen.
- \*Waking up in room in which a bat is present
- \*Presence of a bat around an unattended child.

The Department of Health recommends that anyone who experiences direct, physical contact with a bat should immediately contact their healthcare provider or their local public health nursing office for help and further information. If possible, any bat contacting humans should be carefully captured so that rabies testing can be performed.

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