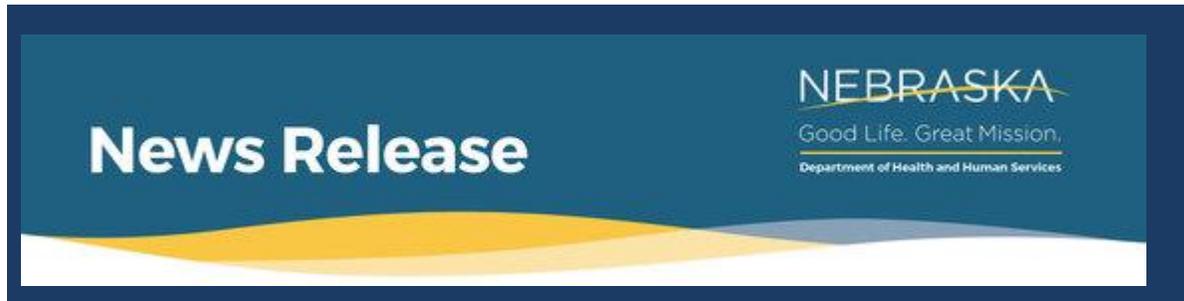DHHS News Release: Bat Testing for Rabies at its Peak

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Bat Testing for Rabies at its Peak

Lincoln - The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services reminds Nebraskans that it's bat season again. Higher levels of bat activity means the possibility of exposure to rabies increases.

"August is the peak month for testing bats for rabies," said Dr. Tom Safranek, State Epidemiologist for DHHS. "It's important for people to be careful around bats and other wild animals like skunks, foxes, coyotes and raccoons or domestic stray animals like cats and dogs which are less likely to be vaccinated. These animals could potentially have rabies and transmit it to people."

Rabies is caused by a virus that affects the nervous system and is transmitted by the bite of an infected animal or if saliva from a rabid animal gets directly into an open wound or a person's eyes, nose, or mouth. Rabies is generally fatal without preventive treatment.

Help prevent the spread of rabies by following these recommendations:

- Be a responsible animal owner. Keep rabies vaccinations up-to-date for all dogs, cats, ferrets, and other animals you own.

- Seek immediate veterinary assistance for your pet if it's bitten by a wild animal or exposed to a bat.

- Call your local animal control agency about removing stray animals in your neighborhood.

- Do not touch, feed, or unintentionally attract wild animals with open garbage cans or litter.

- Never adopt wild animals or bring them into your home. Do not try to nurse sick, wild animals to health. Call animal control or an animal rescue agency for assistance.

- Teach children never to handle unfamiliar animals, wild or domestic, even if they appear friendly. "Love your own, leave other animals alone" is a good principle for children to reduce the risk of contact with rabid animals.

- Maintain homes and other buildings so bats can't get inside.

- If a bat is in your house, don't let it outside until you talk to animal control or public health officials. If you can do it without putting yourself at risk for physical contact or being bitten, try to cover the bat with a large can or bucket, and close the door to the room.

If you think you've been bitten by a bat:

- Seek immediate medical attention if you've been in direct contact with or bitten by a bat.

- If you wake up and find a bat in your room, you should try to safely capture the bat and have it tested. The same precautions should be used if you see a bat in a room with an unattended child.

- If you or a family member has been in close proximity to a bat, consult your doctor or local health department for assistance to determine if you might have been exposed to rabies and need preventive treatment.

- People often know when they've been bitten by a bat but its small teeth can make a bite mark difficult to find. It's better to be safe than sorry. Try to safely capture the bat or call animal control, have the bat tested and seek medical advice.

Animal Rabies Cases in Nebraska

2017 – 13 animals have tested positive for rabies so far (4 bats, 7 skunks, and 2 cats)
2016 – 19 cases (14 bats, 4 skunks, and 1 bovine)
2015 – 28 cases (16 bats, 8 skunks, 2 cattle, 1 dog, and 1 cat)
2014 – 21 cases (10 bats, 7 skunks, and 4 cattle)
2013 – 33 cases (14 skunks, 7 cattle, 6 bats, 3 cats, 1 dog, 1 horse, and 1 llama)
2012 – 59 cases
2011 – 35 cases
2010 – 53 cases
2009 – 90 cases

No human cases of rabies have occurred among Nebraskans since the 1920s.

For more stats on the number of rabies cases in Nebraska, go to - http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/srd_rabies.aspx.

Rabies in Nebraska, a comprehensive report can be found at - http://dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/Documents/PH-PAM-62E.pdf.

Find more information on bat-proofing your home - http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/bats/management/index.html.

General information about rabies can be found here - http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/index.html.

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