Wildlife Can Carry Rabies—Always Have Situational Awareness
Group Leader Takes Life-Saving Action

MOOSE, WY—Visitors to Grand Teton National Park are reminded that wildlife can carry disease, including rabies. The risk of humans contracting rabies from wildlife is very low.

This past week a park visitor was bitten by a bat that tested positive for rabies. The visitor was with an organized group near Jenny Lake when a bat fell from a tree onto the visitor’s shoulder. As the visitor tried to brush the bat off, the bat bit the individual’s hand. A leader of the group safely captured the bat in a plastic bag and contacted park rangers for assistance.

Park staff transferred the bat to the Wyoming State Veterinary Laboratory for testing. The visitor was evaluated at St. John’s Medical Center and consulted with National Park Service Public Health officials. Post-exposure treatment was deferred at the time, pending the results of the rabies testing. When the test results were positive for rabies, the visitor was contacted and immediately began treatment.

Grand Teton National Park Acting Superintendent Gopaul Noojibail shared his concern and well wishes to the individual affected and said, “The group leader did the right thing by safely capturing the bat and reporting this situation to park rangers, which assured that life-saving procedures were followed.”

The park worked in cooperation with Teton County Health Department, Wyoming Department of Health and National Park Service Public Health on this incident to assure an appropriate response.

Rabies is a rare but real concern. Rabies is almost always fatal but completely preventable if treated before symptoms begin. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the vast majority of rabies cases reported each year occur in wild animals such as raccoons, skunks, bats and feral cats.

Bats are an important part of the ecosystem. At least 12 species of bats have been found in Grand Teton National Park. They eat insects and some pollinate plants. Typically, less than 1% of bats have rabies. To date this calendar year, there have been a total of five bats that have tested positive for rabies in Wyoming.

Human-bat exposure can happen in natural and developed settings, such as in or around older log buildings. To limit human encounters with bats, close outside doors at all times, especially around dawn and dusk, and open windows should have screens without holes.

Teton County Health Department reminds residents and visitors that if they encounter a bat and may have been potentially exposed to try to properly capture the bat and submit it to a veterinarian office.
for testing. Visit https://www.cdc.gov/rabies/bats/contact/capture.html for more information about properly capturing a bat. If unable to safely capture the bat, please call a pest service to assist.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend evaluation for post-exposure treatment when:

- Contact with a bat,
- Waking up in a room with a bat, or
- Witnessing a bat in a room with a previously unattended child, person with a mental or cognitive disability, or intoxicated individual.

It is important for a potentially exposed individuals to be evaluated by a medical professional as soon as possible. Please call the Teton County Health Department at 307-733-6401 with any questions concerning a potential bat exposure. For more information about rabies visit https://www.cdc.gov/rabies/.

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