



Colorado Department
of Public Health
and Environment

NEWS RELEASE

Office of Communications
Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

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Wild rabid bat found at Denver Zoo

Anyone having contact with the rabid bat may need vaccinations for rabies

DENVER— A wild bat found at the Denver Zoo on Sunday at 11:30 a.m. in front of Bird World exhibit has tested positive for rabies. A person employed at the zoo was bitten by the bat and is receiving rabies vaccinations.

Dr. Elisabeth Lawaczek, state veterinarian, said, “Parents who had children in the zoo on Sunday, May 20, should ask their children if they had any contact with a bat. Anyone who may have handled or touched the bat, or learns their child had contact with the bat, should immediately contact the state health department at 303-692-2700 or their local health department to determine whether they should receive preventive therapy for rabies.

“People can be exposed to rabies when they assist, feed or handle wild animals. While some people visiting the zoo were in the vicinity of the bat, it is not known whether anyone other than the zoo employee had contact with the bat,” Lawaczek said.

Tiffany Barnhart, Denver Zoo director of communications, said, “The safety of our visitors, employees and animals is our number one priority. Denver Zoo’s animal care and veterinary staff routinely vaccinate our animal collection for rabies and we currently do not have concerns that any of our animals have been infected. We will maintain our diligence but want to ensure our community protects themselves and their pets.”

Rabies is caused by a virus transmitted by the bite of an infected animal. But, because bat teeth are very small and sharp, a wound from a bat bite may not be visible. Rabies also can be transmitted by a scratch or if the animal’s saliva gets into a cut or break in the skin. Just seeing the bat or being in the area, without any physical contact, is **not** a risk.

To avoid exposure to rabies:

- Never touch a wild bat or any other wild animal. A healthy bat likely will not come near enough to be touched, so a bat that is slow, lying on the ground or that lands on a person could be showing signs of illness. If you can touch the animal, chances are it is sick. Children who find a bat should leave it where it is and tell an adult.
- Do not pick up a bat with your hands, even if you're wearing gloves. Use a shovel.
- If you are bitten by a bat or if you suspect you've been exposed to its saliva, try to contain the bat without touching it, and contact your local animal control agency or health department so the bat can be tested.
- Keep your doors and windows covered with intact screens. Do not leave screenless doors or windows open in the evening.
- If you have bats in your house, try to find the source of their entry and seal it. Call a local nuisance wildlife trapper who has experience on how to do this. Also, one should check whether there are young bats that do not leave the house at night before sealing the home.
- Make sure your pets are vaccinated against rabies.