



August 30, 2011

To: Douglas County Health Care Providers and Pharmacies
From: Douglas County Health Department

Subject: Guidance on managing possible exposures to rabies

Bats are beginning to seek shelter for the winter, bringing them into closer contact with humans. As a reminder, skunks and bats are the primary reservoirs of rabies in Nebraska. Other wild mammals, and domestic animals, such as dogs, cats, cattle, and horses can be infected and can also become a source of exposure to people. Bat bites can be easy to overlook and any skin contact with a flying bat can result in a bite and/or saliva exposure. Finding a bat in a room with young children, elderly individuals, any sleeping person, or anyone who is unable to understand and communicate well should be considered a potential exposure, even if there is no evidence of a bite (CDC 2008, pg. 13).

If the wild animal can be captured and tested for rabies, or a domestic animal can be located and observed for 10 days, post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) can wait until testing or observation is complete. Note: patients should not attempt to catch a bat themselves. They should try to isolate the bat in a room, place a towel at the bottom of the door, and call the animal control phone number below. Prophylaxis should not be delayed if an exposure occurred and the animal is not available for testing, if the animal was aggressive or ill, or if there were bites to the face or neck. There is no time limit on initiation of PEP if an exposure is identified retrospectively.

The CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends the use of human rabies immune globulin (HRIG) for previously unvaccinated persons, directly in the wound or proximal to it, if possible, in combination with a 4-dose vaccination schedule for most people, and a 5-dose schedule for persons with altered immunocompetence. Previously vaccinated persons should receive 2 doses, but no HRIG. The 4-dose regimen should be administered intramuscularly, with the first dose administered as soon as possible after exposure (day 0), and on days 3, 7, and 14 after the first vaccination. Detailed instructions are in the ACIP references below (CDC 2008, pg. 16; CDC 2010 pg. 6).

Please find the attached algorithm for managing exposures to bats. This and other references can be found on the Douglas County Health Department Rabies page at: http://www.douglascountyhealth.com/disease-a-immunization/rabies.

Epidemiology and environmental health staff at the Douglas County Health Department (DCHD) are available to assist with assessment of the need for post-exposure prophylaxis or other questions.

Douglas County Health Department useful phone numbers for assistance with rabies issues

Table with 2 columns: Issue type and Contact information. Rows include: Exposure assessment assistance and questions regarding post-exposure prophylaxis; Environmental consultations, bat-proofing; Animal control / capture / testing issues.

References:

CDC 2008. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Human Rabies Prevention - United States, 2008. Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices. MMWR 2008;57(No. RR-3: 1-28.) (Accessed August 29, 2011 at http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/rr/rr5703.pdf)

CDC 2010. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Use of a Reduced (4-dose) Vaccine Schedule for Postexposure Prophylaxis to Prevent Human Rabies. Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices. MMWR 2010;59(No. RR-2: 1-9.) (Accessed August 29, 2011 at http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/rr/rr5902.pdf)