



*DOUGLAS COUNTY*  
**HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

**NEWS RELEASE**  
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**PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICIALS REMIND THE PUBLIC  
TO PROTECT AGAINST RABIES**

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According to a report from the Oregon Department of Human Services, 8 animals in Oregon have tested positive for rabies so far this year. One of these animals was a bat found in Douglas County. "The bat was found outside a home near Dixonville," said Terry Westfall, Environmental Specialist with Douglas County Environmental Health. It was alive when it was captured and had bitten an adult male.

"People can do two things to protect themselves and their pets from rabies. Never handle bats, and make sure your cats and dogs are up to date on their rabies vaccines," said Westfall. It is also important to make sure that children know the dangers of handling or playing with bats.

Rabies is an infectious viral disease that affects the nervous system and is caused by exposure to a rabid animal. Exposure is usually through a bite, but can also occur through scratches and saliva contact with broken skin. Rabies is almost always fatal once symptoms begin.

Bats suffering from rabies will normally bite in self defense, but pose little danger to people who do not handle them. If a bat is found during daylight hours, it is most likely unhealthy and should be avoided.

Vaccinating pets against rabies protects them and provides a buffer zone between humans and rabid wild animals. It is recommended that unvaccinated pets that are exposed to rabies be euthanized.

Nationally, twice as many cats as dogs are reported to have rabies each year. "It is unfortunate that only dogs are required by law to be vaccinated for rabies and not cats, since cats and foxes will capture and play with a sick bat that resembles an injured bird, a normal food source," said Westfall.

Although human rabies is rare in the United States, numbering two to six cases a year, animal bites are very common. As a result, thousands of people annually receive rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), underscoring the importance of education and prevention.

“Any exposure to bats should be taken seriously: whether you are bitten or find a bat in your home that you didn't see enter. Safely capture it and contact the local Health Department or Animal Control office to have it tested for rabies,” said Westfall.

To report animal bites or exposure to bats, call Douglas County Animal Control at 440-4328. For more information, call Douglas County Environmental Health at 440-3569 or visit the CDC website at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

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