



County of Yolo

HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Birds, Bees, and...Bats?

Woodland--It is springtime - bees are buzzing, birds are chirping, and bats are coming out of hibernation or returning for the summer. Yolo County has one of the largest bat colonies in California, and it is quite a sight to watch the bats fly out at night to hunt their food. However, Yolo County also has one of the highest numbers of rabid bats in the state, second only to Los Angeles County. In a recent report of animal rabies in the state, Yolo County tallied 11 rabies-positive bats, tying San Diego County, and coming directly behind Los Angeles County at 24. Other counties surrounding Yolo do not even come near this number, with Sacramento and Solano counties having only two positive bats in 2007.

“It is important to note that, while these animals serve an important ecological role, they can also be carriers of a deadly disease.” states Dr. Bette Hinton, Yolo County Health Officer. “Rabies is 100% fatal, but also 100% preventable.”

As we approach the busier part of the bat season in the summer and fall, all residents of the County are warned to avoid not only direct contact with bats but especially those that are sick or are showing abnormal behaviors such as lying on the ground or being out during the daytime. Residents should avoid any other behaviors that might increase potential interaction with bats, such as keeping bat boxes in residential neighborhoods.

Any bats, healthy, sick or dead, that have come in contact with people, pets or livestock should be isolated and contained for testing whenever possible. Bats found inside your home should be reported, even when you're not sure if direct contact has been made with the animal. Reports should be filed with the Health Department immediately at 530-666-8646 or Yolo County Animal Services at (530) 668-5287.

Yolo County tested 212 animals for rabies last year, with 11 being positive for rabies – all of them bats. “Rabies follow-up investigations and prophylaxis require a lot of resources. It utilizes staff across several departments and divisions of the county” explains Hinton, pointing out that primary care providers, emergency room staff, environmental health specialists, public health nurses, and animal control officers all get involved. Several wheels are put in motion when someone is bitten or in contact with a potentially rabid animal, since rabies is 100% fatal if left untreated. Treatment must begin within a few days of the contact to be effective.

“My hope is that the more people know about rabies, the more likely they are to avoid potential interactions with animals that are known to carry rabies, such as bats.” Hinton adds.

Other wild animals in our area known to carry the rabies virus are skunks and foxes. Wild animals should not be kept as pets. It is very important to report any contact or bites from warm-blooded animals to the Health Department as soon as possible. Pet owners are advised to vaccinate and keep current, rabies vaccinations of their dogs and cats.

For more information about bats and rabies, please view the Center for Disease Control’s (CDC) informative brochure on the Yolo County Health Department’s website at <http://www.yolocounty.org/org/health/bulletins/bats.asp>.

For a website designed especially for helping children learn about rabies, please visit the CDC at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/kidsrabies/FastFacts/rabies.htm>.

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