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Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HEADLINE: People Urged to Take Precautions Around Bats

LEWISTON, IDAHO – Public Health – Idaho North Central District (PH-INCD) is receiving calls and inquiries about people encountering bats. “This seems awfully early in the year to be receiving calls about bat encounters,” says Ed Marugg, Environmental Health Director with PH-INCD. “We have had bats test positive for the rabies virus here in North Central Idaho over the past several years, so we would like to encourage people to avoid any kind of contact with bats that they may encounter,” says Marugg.

Rabies is a rare disease in humans; however, one or more fatal human cases do occur almost every year in the United States, predominantly from rabid bat exposures. Rabies is essentially 100% fatal; however, it is nearly always preventable by reducing exposures to wild and unvaccinated animals and medically managing animals and individuals who may have been exposed to rabid animals early after an exposure.

Rabies is caused by a virus that is spread from infected mammals through their saliva, usually through a bite or scratch. All warm-blooded animals are susceptible to rabies infection. Wild animals are much more likely to carry rabies, especially bats in Idaho, but the bite of any wild animal should be considered a potential source of rabies unless proven otherwise. Animals with rabies typically act differently than healthy animals. Because rabies attacks the brain, changes in an animal’s behavior are likely and may include problems such as swallowing, increased drooling, aggression, and some wild animals may move more slowly or may act as if they are tame. Every year, Idaho averages more than 15 rabid bat reports.

Dogs, cats, ferrets and horses should all receive routine vaccinations for rabies. Rabies vaccines are of great value in protecting animals from contracting rabies. Please contact your veterinarian regarding rabies vaccinations. Vaccinating domestic animals not only protects them but also their owners, should pets be exposed to rabid animals.

People usually come in contact with bats through a pet bringing home a sick or dead bat, or by a bat entering their homes through small openings or open windows. People who wake up from sleeping and find a bat in their room may have had an exposure without realizing it; the teeth of a bat are very small and people are sometimes bitten in their sleep without feeling it. The bat should be tested for rabies if there is any question that an exposure may have occurred.

To protect yourself and your pets, Public Health offers the following tips:

- If you find a wounded or dead bat, DO NOT touch a bat with your bare hands;
- If you have had an encounter with a bat, seek medical attention immediately;
- If you or a pet have come in contact with a bat, save the bat in a container without touching it and contact your local Public Health District to arrange testing for rabies. The bat must be received dead and have come in contact with a human or pet in order to be tested;
- Always vaccinate your pets, including horses. Pets may encounter bats outdoors or in the home; and
- Bat-proof your home or cabin by plugging all holes in the siding and maintaining tight-fitting screens on windows.

For further information please contact Ed Marugg, Environmental Health Director, Public Health – Idaho North Central District at 208-799-0356 or visit www.idahopublichealth.com.