



## Rogue Valley Equine Hospital

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### Rabies exposures on the rise

Oregon health officials are warning people to protect themselves and their pets from rabies after finding five rabid bats since the beginning of 2008.

Since the beginning of 2008 five rabies-infected bats have been found in Oregon, prompting health officials to remind people to protect themselves and their pets against the disease."

"People can take two precautions to protect themselves and their pets from bats and rabies," said Dr. Emilio DeBess, public health veterinarian in the Oregon Department of Human Services State Public Health Division.

"Never handle bats; and make sure your cats and dogs are up to date on their rabies vaccines."

Rabies is common among bats, DeBess said. Bats play an important role in the ecosystem, especially in controlling insects at night, DeBess said. Oregon bats often eat mosquitoes and can catch over 1,000 tiny insects in an hour.

Unfortunately, bats often carry rabies, said DeBess. "If you find a bat during the daylight hours, it is probably not healthy and should be avoided.

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

Bats that do not have rabies generally do not fly into people, said DeBess. So if a bat touches you, think about rabies and ask your doctor promptly and ask about rabies vaccination

Of the sick and dead bats tested in Oregon during the last 10 years, about 9.5 percent have had rabies. If a bat is captured and tested and proves not to have rabies, no vaccination is needed.

Other mammals in Oregon can be infected with rabies from bats.

"Vaccinating pets against rabies protects them and provides a buffer zone between humans and rabid wild animals, he said. And, sadly, if a pet is unvaccinated and is exposed to rabies, the recommendation is that it be euthanized."

Protect your home against bat by using door and window screens and keep buildings in good repair, so bats cannot enter them. Use bright lights in the attic if you think bats are roosting there. After several days of lights, bats will probably leave and then you can seal their entrance.

Medical therapy for someone who has been exposed to rabies averages more than \$3,000.