

June 6, 2017

Bats are out in this warmer weather – a reminder about rabies exposure assessments

Actions Requested

- **Keep a copy of the algorithm in the Washington State “Prevention of Human Rabies” guidance on hand** and refer to it as needed when evaluating patients who have had animal bites, scratches, or other potential rabies exposures.
- **Know where rabies vaccine and Human Rabies Immune Globulin (HRIG) can be found within Kitsap County so you can refer patients as needed for rabies post-exposure prophylaxis.**
 - HRIG is available from Harrison ED and Harrison Infusion Center (Optimum).
 - Vaccine is available at Harrison Infusion Center (Optimum) and can be ordered by providers as needed.
 - *Note that providers referring to Optimum must complete a form.*
- **Call us at any time (24/7) to discuss an exposure assessment and to report any suspected rabies exposures or suspected clinical cases of human rabies.**

For questions, please contact our Communicable Disease staff at 360-728-2235.

Background

As we begin to see warmer weather, we also see bats and wildlife becoming more active. Likewise, our own outdoor activities can increase the potential for interaction with animals – including bats, other wild animals, and domesticated pets. In Washington State, bats are our only known reservoir for rabies. Rabid bats are identified within the state every year. It is extremely rare that other animal species in Washington are found to have rabies, but given the potential for a rabid animal to be imported from another state/country or an animal to get rabies from a bat, we want to remind you of the importance of conducting a rabies exposure assessment for all animal bites, scratches, or other potential exposures.

Please utilize the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) algorithm (*attached*) to aid you in evaluating the potential for rabies as well as need for rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP). Keep in mind that PEP is generally recommended when a bat is found in a room with a person who cannot reliably say that an exposure did not occur (e.g., unattended infant or child, intoxicated adult, sleeping person). Bat bites may not leave visible marks and an exposure assessment is always warranted for such situations.

Our Communicable Disease staff can approve and arrange for testing of an animal (bat or other) at the Washington State Public Health Laboratories. Testing the animal is helpful to rule-out the need for PEP. For the purposes of exposure assessments, all bats should be presumed to be rabid unless testing proves they are negative for rabies. Conducting a 10-day observation of dogs, cats, and ferrets is another tool for assessing whether they were rabid when they bit/scratched someone; however, note that this does not apply to other species, nor does it apply to dogs, cats, and ferrets who were themselves exposed to a potentially rabid animal such as a bat.

Prompt wound management, including irrigation and cleansing as well as assessment of need for a tetanus immunization or booster, is an important part of rabies prevention.

Resources

- WA DOH “Prevention of Human Rabies: Assessment of Rabies Exposures from Animal Contact and Guidance on Rabies Post-Exposure Prophylaxis” (*full guidance; updated December 2016*): <http://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/5100/RabiesPEPGuidance.pdf>
- Kitsap Public Health District webpage on rabies: <http://www.kitsappublichealth.org/CommunityHealth/rabies.php>

Attachments

- WA DOH “Human Rabies Prevention Algorithm” (*algorithm only; updated December 2016*)