

# **LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**

## **PEST OF THE MONTH PROGRAM NO. 36**

### **BATS ON SCHOOL GROUNDS AND OTHER DISTRICT PROPERTIES.**

When people hear about bats, they often imagine or think things that are not true. Bats are not blind. They use a sophisticated system called echolocation to find their prey. They are neither rodents nor birds. They do not fly into, or become entangled, in women's hair. Bats that occur naturally in the United States do not suck blood ---and most do not have rabies. Bats play important roles in ecosystems around the world, from rain forests to deserts, especially by eating insects, including those that damage crops or carry diseases. Bats are also effective pollinators. The best protection we can offer these mammals is to learn more about their habits, biology, and behavior and recognize the value of living safely with them.

Recently, several students from Calabasas and Agoura High Schools in the Las Virgenes, California Unified School District were found caring for sick bats. One bat was submitted by a veterinarian to Los Angeles County Public Health Department where it was found to have died from rabies. None of the teens were bitten by the bats. However, because one of the bats tested positive for rabies, the students are receiving anti-rabies vaccinations as a precautionary measure.

In response to the above situation, Dr. Jonathan E. Fielding, Los Angeles County Director of Public Health made the following statement: "Nearly every year, Public Health responds to at least one incident on a school campus where a student or teacher has handled a bat." The main reason for putting out this Pest of the Month Program is to educate and inform people so we can avoid such an incident.

Bats are common sources of rabies in California. In 2006, 201 rabid animals were diagnosed statewide. One hundred and fifty eight of these were bats, 40 were skunks, and 2 were foxes. Currently in the United States, bats account for most cases of rabies in people. Most recent human rabies cases in the United States have been transmitted by bats. In the United States, there are usually only 1-2 human cases of rabies per year. Seventeen of the naturally acquired cases of rabies in humans in the USA from 1997-2006 were associated with bats. From 2000 through 2006, Los Angeles County averaged nine rabid bats a year. So far this year, 14 rabid bats have been found in the county. No one knows why so many rabid bats are being encountered in Los Angeles County this year.

It is important that we become informed and aware of this situation and be ready to respond should a bat incident occur on District property. Awareness of the facts about bats and rabies can help people protect themselves, their families, and their pets.

## **NEVER HANDLE ANY BAT**

- You cannot tell if a bat has rabies by just looking at it.
- Rabies can only be confirmed by having a suspected animal tested in a laboratory.
- However, any bat that is active during the day, is found in a place where bats are not usually seen (for example in rooms indoors or on the lawn), or is unable to fly, is far more likely than others to be rabid. Such bats are often easily approached as they seem to lose their natural fear of humans.
- A rabid bat is a sick bat. Such an animal does not behave as normal bats do. You will not see a healthy, normal bat (especially during the day) on the ground flapping its wings but not able to fly. Acute behavioral changes and unexplained progressive paralysis are good signs of a rabid bat.
- To minimize the risk for rabies, **it is best to never touch or handle any bat.**

## **HOW DO PEOPLE GET RABIES FROM BATS?**

People usually get rabies from the bite or scratch of a rabid bat. It is also possible, but quite rare, that people may get rabies if infectious material from a rabid animal, such as saliva, gets directly into their eyes, nose, mouth, or wounds such as scratches, abrasions, cuts, and open wounds.

Early signs of rabies in humans include irritability, headache, and fever. There may be itching or pain at the site of exposure.

## **WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU SEE A BAT DURING THE DAY DISPLAYING ABNORMAL BEHAVIOR.**

- Teach children to never handle unfamiliar animals, wild or domestic, even if they appear friendly. “Love your own, leave other animals alone” is a good principle for children to learn.
- Report a bat on District property immediately to a responsible adult. Call the plant manager for help.
- Stay away from the bat. Do not capture or handle bats.
- Do not touch or try to pet a bat that cannot fly.
- If a bat is found on the ground in a school yard, keep children away from the area. Secure the area with caution tape and keep people away. Do not allow anyone to try to catch the bat.
- If a bat is found indoors, evacuate the area and close the door. If there was potential exposure, the bat may have to be retrieved for testing.
- Call the City of Los Angeles, Animal Services Centers at 1 888 452 – 7381.
- In case of an emergency, call 911.

- You can also call LAUSD Pest Management Department at 213 743 – 1102 for advice and assistance.
- Report cases of suspected rabies in animals to LA County Veterinary Public Health at 323 730- 3723.

## **SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON BATS AND RABIES**

The following web sites provide useful information on bats and rabies

[www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/rabies](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/rabies)

You can call the Centers for Disease Control public response hotline at 888 246-2675 (English), 1 888 246-2857 (Espanol), or 866 874-2646 (TTY).

URL <http://www.lapublichealth.org> County of Los Angeles, Public Health Department just posted a public health news release on this URL on 13 August, 2007 entitled: Public Health Advises Students, Teachers to Avoid Bats.

[www.batcon.org](http://www.batcon.org)

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