



NEWS RELEASE

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For immediate release

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Nebraska Panhandle person's death is being investigated due to possible rabies infection

A Nebraska Panhandle person's death is being investigated due to possible rabies infection. There is no risk to the public at large. Any family and healthcare professionals suspected of being in contact with the individual are being assessed for exposure, and those deemed at risk are being offered post-exposure prophylaxis. Rabies deaths are rare but pose a serious public health threat due to its high death rate in people.

About Rabies

Rabies is a fatal but preventable viral disease. It can be spread to people and pets through the bites and scratches of an infected animal. Rabies primarily affects the central nervous system, leading to severe brain disease and death if medical care is not received before symptoms start.

Immediate medical attention following suspected rabies exposure is critical. Medical care following a rabies exposure is called post-exposure prophylaxis or PEP. PEP includes wound care, a dose of human rabies immune globulin (HRIG), and a series of four or five rabies vaccines, which must be administered as soon as possible after exposure. This care is vital to prevent the disease from developing. It is nearly 100% effective if administered promptly. Each year, 60,000 Americans receive PEP after a potential rabies exposure.

The disease is rare in humans in the United States, with fewer than 10 deaths reported each year. Still, rabies poses a serious public health threat, because of its high death rate in people. It is also present in many wildlife species, nearly 3 in 4 Americans live in a community where raccoons, skunks, or foxes carry rabies.

Prevention

Rabies prevention efforts by veterinary, wildlife management, and public health professionals mean that human cases of rabies in the US are rare. Veterinarians vaccinate over 40 million cats and dogs each year, and these vaccinations significantly reduce the risk of you or your pets getting rabies. Bats, raccoons, skunks, and foxes are known to carry rabies. Each year, wildlife management professionals distribute oral vaccines to wildlife, through baits, to control rabies at its source, especially in areas where rabies in wild animals is common.

The best way you can prevent rabies is by:

- Making sure your pets are up-to-date on their rabies vaccines;
- Keeping wildlife wild - stay away from wildlife for both human and animal safety;
- Calling animal control to remove stray animals from your neighborhood;
- Washing bites or scratches immediately with soap and water; and
- Seeking medical care shortly after potential exposures.

If you have any questions about rabies, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/rabies/about/index.html> or call Emily Timm at 308-763-8042 or e-mail etimm@pphd.ne.gov. Panhandle Public Health District is working together to improve the health, safety, and quality of life for all who live, learn, work, and play in the Panhandle. Our vision is that we are a healthier and safer Panhandle Community.