



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

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## Grand Canyon News Release

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### **River runner to receive rabies treatment after being bitten by a bat at Lees Ferry**

**Grand Canyon, Ariz.** – A river runner in Grand Canyon National Park needs to receive rabies treatment after being bitten or scratched by a rabid bat August 21, 2007 at Lees Ferry, Arizona. The river runner was loading his boat with supplies when a young bat (cave myotis) flew into his shirt, which was lying next to him. When the river runner put his shirt back on, the bat bit/scratched him on the left hip.

After the incident, the bat was captured, euthanized and submitted for testing. On August 22, the Arizona State Health Lab determined that the bat had rabies. Since the river runner had continued with his river trip, the National Park Service is evacuating him by helicopter out of the canyon today. He will be flown to and examined at the Grand Canyon Clinic on the South Rim, and then he will be released to transport himself to Flagstaff for further testing and treatment.

Someone exposed to rabies undergoes postexposure prophylaxis or PEP. In the United States, postexposure prophylaxis consists of a regimen of one dose of immune globulin and five doses of rabies vaccine over a 28-day period. Rabies immune globulin and the first dose of rabies vaccine should be given by a health care provider as soon as possible after exposure. Additional doses of rabies vaccine should be given 3, 7, 14 and 28 days after the first vaccination. Current vaccines are relatively painless and are given in a person's arm, like a flu or tetanus vaccine.

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In Arizona, approximately 30 people each year have known contact with laboratory-confirmed rabid animals. In this state, rabies most commonly occurs in bats, skunks and foxes, but any mammal can contract the disease. Rabid animals may show unusual behavior or appear unstable. Wild animals exhibiting unusual behavior should be reported to local animal control officials.

Examples of unusual behavior include wild animals that show no fear of people and pets; nocturnal animals that are active in daylight; or bats found on the ground, in swimming pools or that have been caught by a pet.

It is estimated that less than one percent of bats in nature carry rabies, but people should always use caution around wild animals. The Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) recommends the following precautions:

- Keep people and pets away from wild animals. Teach children not to pick up, touch, or feed wild or unfamiliar animals, especially sick or wounded ones.
- Do not “rescue” seemingly abandoned young wild animals.
- Vaccinate all dogs and cats against rabies. Pets should be kept in a fenced yard.
- Take precautions when camping, hunting or fishing. Avoid sleeping on the open ground without the protection of a closed tent or camper. Keep pets on a leash and do not allow them to wander.
- Do not disturb roosting bats. If you find a bat on the ground, don’t touch it. Report the bat and its location to your local animal control officer or health department. Place a box over the bat to contain it. Be careful not to damage the bat in any way since it must be intact for rabies testing.

If you have questions regarding the incident at the Grand Canyon, please contact Adam Kramer, public health consultant, at 303-969-2922. For more information about rabies, contact ADHS Vector-Borne & Zoonotic Disease Section at 602-364-4562.

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