Riverside county officials: Let’s have a bat-free Halloween

While bats may be one of Halloween’s scary traditions, Riverside County health officials are urging residents to avoid handling the winged creatures because the animals could be infected with rabies.

Riverside University Health System-Public Health is reporting that several residents have gone through anti-rabies treatment after coming in contact with dead or injured bats infected with rabies. In some cases the patient was scratched or bitten by the injured animal. In Riverside County, there have been nine bats that have tested positive for rabies so far this year, compared to two in 2018.
“If you find a bat in your street or yard, steer clear,” said Dr. Cameron Kaiser, public health officer for Riverside County. “Rabies in humans is very rare, but if you’re exposed and it’s not dealt with promptly, rabies is almost always fatal. Leave bats alone.”

One of the most important lessons for parents to teach children is the message promoted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Teach children never to 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.

Rabies can also impact our four-legged family members, who can become infected by coming in contact with a dead or injured bat.

“To ensure your pet’s health and safety, owners should always keep their pet’s rabies vaccination current,” said Dr. Allan Drusys, Riverside County Animal Services’ director and the county’s chief veterinarian. “We all know pets can be very curious and are highly likely to sniff at or try to poke at a seemingly dead bat on a sidewalk or in the backyard. Many times when we see these bats during daylight hours, it’s because they’re sick. Even a dead bat should be treated with caution to avoid any possible infection or transmission.”

Anyone who believes they have been exposed to a bat should consult their health care provider. Exposure can happen even when a bite or scratch has not occurred (such as contact with the bat’s saliva or feces). Anyone who finds a bat on their property or inside their home should contact their local animal control for assistance. Residents within Riverside County Animal Services jurisdiction can call 951-358-7387.

People can also seek further information by calling the county’s disease control number at 951-358-5107.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has a link with helpful information, including tips for parents to give to their children (look for the dog cartoon on the left of the screen): www.cdc.gov/rabies/bats/education/index.html