

East Bay man bitten by bat dies from rabies

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MARTINEZ, Calif. (KGO) -- Health officials in Contra Costa County say that although an East Bay man who died from rabies died overseas, he actually contracted the disease close to home.

It sounds like a prime example of what not to do when one encounters a bat. Unfortunately, the 34-year-old man paid for the encounter with his life. Health officials say the bat in question is a variety commonly found in Mexico, the southern United States, and Contra Costa County.

About 1 in 10 bats tested in California during the course of the year test positive for rabies. The man who died made contact with a bat earlier this year and then traveled to Europe where he became ill and died in Switzerland in late July.

"In mid-September, an acquaintance called Contra Costa County Public Health and indicated that there had been an incident in late March of 2012 in the south part of Contra Costa County where a bat was flopping on the ground and acting weird," said Erika Jensen with Contra Costa County Public Health. "Another individual picked up the bat with a plastic bag. The gentleman who died of rabies went over and stuck his hand in the plastic bag and most likely was bitten."

Had the man notified the county or contacted a doctor, he would have received a rabies vaccine and officials say it is likely he would have survived. The initial bite from a bat is akin to a bee sting, so the man may not have initially thought that it was all that serious.

In this case, the health department identified and notified several dozen people both in the U.S. and abroad who may have had contact with the man, and some of those individuals have been treated with the rabies vaccine. Human-to-human transmission however, is very rare.

Authorities say anyone who has any contact with a bat should contact both their doctor and health officials immediately.

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