

10 day critical period over, still no sign of boys

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FORT MYERS BEACH: Ten days have passed since people saw boys holding, even kissing, a rabid bat on Fort Myers Beach. Three of the boys have yet to be identified or found.

Thursday was the end of the critical period for the boys to get vaccinated for rabies, but the Lee County Health Department still has no idea who, or where, any of them are.

If a person starts vaccines within 10 days of exposure, rabies vaccinations are 100-percent effective. But, with each passing day after that, it becomes less and less likely someone infected with rabies will survive.

Now new fliers are up at Fort Myers Beach warning people about the sick bats. And buzz about the bats has everyone on the beach talking.

Bud Villalobos saw his son-in-law reel one in as an unintended catch, but thankfully they knew the dangers.

"He was fishing. The bat just jumped up and grabbed hold of the bait. And then, it released. But I was just surprised to see that," said Villalobos, who's here visiting from Chicago and saw the news reports.

But there are three people who apparently still haven't gotten word of the rabies scare these creatures have created.

"We really want to find these kids, and we want to find them as quickly as possible," said Jennifer James-Mesloh, with the Lee County Health Department.

The Lee Health Department has launched a media blitz since learning about the potential rabies exposure.

Because they haven't heard from these families by now, health officials believe these kids are long out of the area.

And because that 10-day critical window has now closed, the focus shifts to getting the message out nationally.

"We're working right now on our strategy with our national health partners, to see if they can assist us through their own media networks," said James-Mesloh.

The big concern is that rabies symptoms don't show up for up to two months after exposure, and the symptoms can resemble common sickness.

"Anxiety, fever, muscle spasms, things that you might associate with flu," James-Mesloh said.

But once the symptoms begin, it's far too late.

"Within two to a few days after, it does lead to death," James-Mesloh said.

Now that day 10 has come and gone, the vaccine becomes less effective. The more time that passes, the less likely an infected child will live.

"Every day here after it becomes more critical," said James-Mesloh.

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