

Animal Use Occupational Health and Safety Program

Work with Animals in the Field

The risks of working with animals in the field include

Rabies - Many wild animals (e.g., bats, skunks, raccoons, foxes, wolves, coyotes, other carnivores) may transmit rabies. Bats are the primary source of rabies infection in the United States. Personnel working with animals in the wild are advised to have a pre-exposure rabies vaccination. Anyone whose work involves a risk of bites from these animals should consider immunization against rabies. All bite or scratch wounds involving wild animals require prompt medical evaluation and treatment.

Hantavirus - Uncommon but serious risks associated with using wild rodents include Hantavirus, bubonic plague, and leptospirosis. Deer mice (*Peromyscus maniculatus*) appear to be the principal reservoir for a strain of Hantavirus that is pathogenic to humans.

Zoonotic diseases - A disease that can be passed between animals and humans. These diseases can be caused by viruses, bacteria, parasites, and fungi. Zoonotic diseases, such as psittacosis and avian tuberculosis, can infect wild birds. Wild rabbits may transmit tularemia to those exposed to fresh tissues.

Tick-borne diseases - Ticks can transmit several diseases, including Lyme disease and Rocky Mountain spotted fever. Early treatment can prevent serious consequences such as arthritic, cardiac, and neurological problems, which are more difficult to cure. To prevent tick bites, wear full-length pants and long-sleeved shirts when outdoors in tick-infested areas. Tuck your shirt into your pants and your pant legs into your boots or socks. A tick repellent may also be used on clothing and skin. Inspect yourself often and promptly remove any embedded ticks with forceps or fingers protected by tissue.

If you experience a bull's eye rash 3-30 days after a tick bite, or joint pain, fever, chills, headache or malaise after being bitten by a tick, immediately contact Pocatello Family Medicine at 208-282-4700 during work hours or go to the Pocatello Medical Center Emergency room after hours or on weekends.

There are other hazards to consider in field work such as snake bites, trips and falls, head injuries, drowning, heat stresses and hazards of research equipment. Individuals working in the field should discuss these and potential zoonotic diseases with their principal investigator and the Technical Safety Office.

The feeling of illness or symptoms of illness that appear within two (2) weeks of returning from field research must be attended to immediately by a physician. A "supervisor's report of injury" should be filed with ISU Risk Management and the Occupational Medical Specialist should be informed.