



## Public Health Brief

**Richard O. Johnson, M.D., MPH**

Public Health Officer

Office: 530-694-2146, Ext 249

e-mail: [rjohnson@alpinecountyca.gov](mailto:rjohnson@alpinecountyca.gov)

**Nichole Williamson**

HHS Director

Office: 530-694-2235

24/7/365 Emergency Contact Number

Dispatch: 530-694-2231, Ext 330



Thursday April 4, 2024

## Public Health Includes Environmental Health Services (EHS)

EHS provides program implementation in all environmental health disciplines. Most of us don't even think twice about the safety of our water or food – we just assume someone else is taking care of it for us! Our environmental health staff apply planning, inspection, enforcement, and public education skills in a wide variety of facilities and issues:

- Food establishments
- Sewage disposal facilities
- Water systems
- Well construction
- Swimming pools
- Recreational health facilities
- Occupied housing
- Underground storage tank facilities
- Solid waste facilities
- Land use development
- Rabies and vector control
- Hazardous waste / materials management

Let me focus for a few minutes on rabies and vector control. Since we have chosen to move into the forest, we “rub shoulders” with some in the animal world who have been here much longer than us. In addition, due to global warming, the natural habitat of some species is expanding, presenting risk to us which did not exist years ago.



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Alpine County Health Department, 75-B Diamond Valley Rd., Markleeville, CA 96120

Alpine County Board of Supervisors, Phone: (530) 694-2281

District 1: Charles Dobson, District 2: Ron Hames, District 3: Irvin Jim,

District 4: Terry Woodrow, District 5: David Griffith

Here is a sampling of issues we encounter. I emphasize the risk to all of us is LOW, assuming we take some specific precautions.

Rabies: In California, it is all about bats and skunks. Rabies is almost universally fatal, but preventable. Our dogs are required to be vaccinated, and Animal Bite Reports are investigated by Environmental Health. While I have been a Health Officer, I have been involved in cases involving dogs, cats, bats, bears, mountain lions, and otters. The most important messages – hands off wild animals, and get your dog vaccinated!

<https://www.cdc.gov/rabies/animals/index.html>

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/2024RARTable.pdf>

<https://www.cdc.gov/rabies/prevention/index.html>

Plague: While I served in Mono County, a resident died from plague in her blood stream. Recently, there was a case of plague in a domestic cat in Sierra County north of us:

(<https://www.sierracounty.ca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/9657/Press-Release-Confirmed-Plague-Domestic-Cat-01-26-24>). Plague is endemic in the foothills and mountains of the Sierra region. It is all about rodents and their fleas. If you kill rodents where you live, their fleas will go elsewhere for a blood meal – meaning your pets – and potentially you!

Hantavirus: It is all about the deer mice – yes, the ones with large cute ears, white bellies, and hairless tails. But their urine and feces can be deadly. We live in their territory in the Sierras. See: <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/pages/hantaviruspulmonarysyndrome.aspx>. Beware opening and cleaning out sheds, etc., that have been closed up all winter. Get rid of all potential food sources. Move your wood pile away from your residence. And trap when you find evidence of mice!

And that is only the beginning. There are mosquitoes, potentially with West Nile Virus, dengue, Zika Virus, St. Louis encephalitis, and western equine encephalitis. There are soft ticks carrying tick-borne relapsing fever. (We fortunately do not have documentation of the right type of tick that causes Lyme disease in the Eastern Sierra.) It is amazing that we are still alive! But as I said, the risk is very low, so go out and enjoy your surroundings, and be grateful that you live in such a beautiful area. If you have any questions or comments about any of these programs, please feel free to contact the Alpine County Health Department at 530-694-2146.

## National Public Health Week

Protecting, Connecting, and Thriving: We Are All Public Health!



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Alpine County Health Department, 75-B Diamond Valley Rd., Markleeville, CA 96120

Alpine County Board of Supervisors, Phone: (530) 694-2281

District 1: Charles Dobson, District 2: Ron Hames, District 3: Irvin Jim,

District 4: Terry Woodrow, District 5: David Griffith