

Bat Rabies: The Facts

Porcupine Health Unit, Community Health Inspection Services, Control of Infectious Diseases

What is rabies and how do people get it?

Rabies is an infectious disease caused by a virus that infects nerves of humans and other warm blooded mammals. Any mammal (dog, cat, cow, raccoon, skunk, fox, or bat) can have rabies and transmit it to people. People get rabies from the bite of a rabid animal or by getting the infected animal's saliva directly onto the mucous membrane (eyes, nose, mouth) or on an open cut or scratch.

What is the concern about bats and rabies?

Bat strain rabies is found throughout Canada and the Americas. Although bat rabies is rare, 70% of all human deaths in North America since 1980 were caused by rabid bats. The most recent human case of rabies occurred when an Alberta man who was bitten by a bat in August 2006 did not receive treatment and then died from rabies at the end of April 2007.

What should I do if I'm bitten by a bat?

- Immediately wash the wound well with soap and water;
- consult a physician; and
- notify the Porcupine Health Unit.

Whenever possible, the bat should be safely captured and the local office of the Porcupine Health Unit notified. If you need to handle the bat, wear gloves and use a tool to avoid direct contact with it. The Porcupine Health Unit will make arrangements to have the bat submitted for rabies testing.

Why does the bat need to be tested?

Only testing can determine whether or not the bat is carrying rabies. When a physician doesn't know whether a bat is rabid, they may recommend rabies post-exposure treatment in accordance with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care guidelines.

What should I do if I see a bat outside?

People cannot get rabies from seeing a bat in a cave or at a distance. If you see bats outside, leave them alone. Bats are an important part of our natural environment.

What if I find a bat in the house?

People cannot get rabies from seeing a bat in a house, in the attic, or at a distance. If the bat is still in the house and you are sure no human or pet exposure has occurred, confine the bat to a room by closing all doors and windows leading out of the room except those to the outside. The bat will eventually find its own way out. You can also arrange for a pest control company to remove the bat. If you think a bat has bitten or scratched your pet or domestic animal, contact your veterinarian for advice. It is important to keep rabies vaccinations current for cats, dogs, and other animals.

How can rabies be prevented?

- Teach children never to approach unfamiliar animals, wild or domestic, even if they appear friendly. A good principle to remember is "Love your own, leave other animals alone."
- Wash any wound from an animal thoroughly with soap and water and

seek medical attention immediately.

- If a biting exposure occurs, have all dead, or easily captured bats tested. Remember to wear gloves and use a tool to avoid direct contact with the bat.
- Prevent bats from entering living quarters or occupying spaces in homes, schools or other similar places where they might come in contact with people or pets.
- Be a responsible pet owner by keeping vaccinations for your pet up to date and keeping your pet under direct supervision.

Where can I learn more about rabies?

Porcupine Health Unit
www.porcupinehu.on.ca

Ministry of Health & Long-Term Care
www.health.gov.on.ca

Ministry of Natural Resources
www.mnr.gov.on.ca

Bat Conservation International
www.batcon.org/

Sources: Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Bat Conservation International and Centre for Disease Control, Atlanta

**For more information,
contact your local
health inspector
or call 1-800-461-1818.**

