



Bats and Rabies

What is rabies?

Rabies is a virus that can affect the brain and spinal cord. This virus is found in the saliva of an animal with rabies and can be spread to humans through a bite or scratch. Rabies cannot be cured, but it can be prevented.

What do I need to know about bats and rabies?

In the U.S, most rabies in humans has been due to bat bites that were not recognized or reported. Bats have tiny teeth marks that are difficult to see so the bite may not be noticed. A healthy bat usually avoids people, but a rabid bat may be on the ground so people touch it. If there is any chance that someone has touched a bat, it should be captured and tested for rabies. Besides touching the bat, finding a bat in the room of an unattended child, or waking up to find a bat in the room are also considered possible exposures. Bats flying over head and bats that have not had contact with humans or animals do not pose a risk.

Catching bats for rabies testing:

Rabies is identified by testing the bat in a laboratory and this can determine whether a person needs treatment to prevent rabies. In Boston, if there has been human or pet exposure to a bat, and you know where the bat is, Boston Animal Control (617) 635-5348 can assist with catching the bat.

Follow these steps to capture a bat:

- Bat bites can poke through fabric so use a sturdy container with a lid to contain the bat.
- **Never handle a bat with your bare hands.** Wear thick leather gloves.
- Wait until the bat has landed. Approach the bat slowly and place the container over the bat. Then slide the cover or a piece of cardboard underneath and flip the container over, trapping the bat inside. Secure the lid with tape.
- Submit the bat to the Hinton State Laboratory Institute for rabies testing: Phone 617-983-6385.

What should I do if someone or my pet is bitten by a bat or another animal?

Bats and other wildlife such as skunks, raccoon, foxes, and coyotes can carry rabies. If they are not properly vaccinated, animals such as cats, dogs, ferrets, horses, cattle, goats, and llamas can also get rabies, usually from the bite of a wild animal. Steps to take if bitten by a bat or other animal:

- Thoroughly wash the bite immediately with soap and water.
- Visit your doctor to see if you need treatment against rabies. Other infections, such as tetanus, may also result from a bite wound and require medical attention.
- Wild animals that bite people should be tested for rabies. Boston residents can contact Boston Animal Control (617) 635-5348 for assistance in capturing the animal for testing.
- If you were bitten by someone's pet, get the pet owner's name, address, and telephone number. Contact Boston Animal Control at (617) 635-5348 for assistance.
- In most cases, a dog, cat, or ferret is confined and observed for 10 days. If it becomes ill during the 10 days, a veterinarian should be consulted immediately.
- If you think your pet has been bitten by a bat, contact a veterinarian for assistance immediately. If possible, the bat should be tested for rabies. Remember to keep vaccinations up to date for cats, dogs, and other animals.

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How can rabies be prevented?

- Vaccinated pets prevent the spread of disease between wildlife and people. Vaccinate your pets (dogs, cats, ferrets) against rabies and keep their vaccines up to date.
- Teach children not to play with any unfamiliar animal and to tell an adult if bitten.
- Never leave infants or young children alone with any animal.
- Report stray dogs, cats, or animals showing unusual behavior to Boston Animal Control at (617) 635-5348.
- Don't attract animals to your home or yard, and tightly cover garbage cans and bat-proof your home.
- Don't feed, approach, touch or adopt wild animals. Don't keep wild animals as pets.
- Hunters and trappers should avoid animals with abnormal behavior or animals found dead. Wear gloves while processing game, and cook all meat thoroughly.
- Fair and petting zoo animals that come into contact with the public should be vaccinated.
- When traveling, especially outside the U.S., avoid contact with dogs and cats even if they appear friendly.

What is Rabies Post Exposure Treatment, or PEP?

If a person is exposed to a bat, and that bat is not available for laboratory testing, preventive rabies treatment is usually recommended. This treatment can often be avoided if the bat can be tested for rabies. Preventive treatment after possible rabies exposure is one shot of Human Rabies Immune Globulin (HRIG) and four rabies vaccine shots usually given in the arm.

How can I "bat-proof" my house?

Some bats live in buildings, and there may be no reason to get rid of them if there is little chance for contact with people. However, bats should always be prevented from entering rooms of your home. For assistance with "bat-proofing" your home, contact a wildlife conservation agency or pest control agency.

If you choose to "bat-proof" your home yourself, follow these suggestions:

- Examine your home for holes that might allow bats entry to the home.
- Use window screens, chimney caps, and draft guards beneath doors to attics.
- Fill electrical and plumbing holes with stainless steel wool or caulking.
- Ensure that all doors to the outside close tightly.
- Observe where the bats exit at dusk and exclude them by loosely hanging clear plastic sheeting or bird netting over these areas (bats can leave, but cannot re-enter).
- After bats have been excluded, the openings can be permanently sealed.
- Avoid exclusion from May through August because many young bats are unable to fly and may die trapped inside or make their way into living quarters. If you have a problem during these months, contact a nuisance wildlife control agent, licensed by the state of Massachusetts to remove wildlife. A list of Problem Animal Control (PAC) agents is available at: http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/wildlife/pac/pac_agents_nd.htm
- Most bats leave to hibernate in fall or winter, so this is the best time to "bat-proof."

