

## What is rabies?

Rabies is a disease caused by the rabies virus that affects the nervous system of humans and other warm-blooded mammals. Human rabies is very rare in the United States, but animal rabies, particularly in some wild animal species, is common. Rabies is almost always fatal once symptoms of the disease have begun.

## How is rabies spread?

Rabies virus is found only in the brain, spinal cord, and saliva of infected animals. It can be passed to a person or another animal if any of these fluids or tissues from an animal with rabies by a bite, a fresh opening of the skin that has not scabbed over (wound less than 24 hours old), or mucous membrane (eyes, lining of the nose, or mouth). The chance of getting rabies from an animal with rabies depends on the type of exposure.

## What is an exposure to rabies?

There are two types of possible exposures to the rabies virus. The most dangerous type is from the bite of a known rabid animal that breaks the skin. A non-bite exposure results when saliva, spinal fluid, or brain tissue from a rabid animal gets into an open wound or mucous membrane.

You **CANNOT** get rabies from the following:

- Contact with blood
- Contact with urine or feces
- Contact with dried saliva
- Petting, or otherwise touching the hair of a rabid animal
- Touching bowls, lead ropes, gates, trailers, or other surfaces the rabid animal contacted

## How can I tell if a bat has rabies?

Only a laboratory test can tell if a bat has rabies. However, any bat that is out during the day, is found in a place where bats are not usually seen (for example, in a room in your home or on the lawn), or is unable to fly, may have rabies. So, it is best never to handle any bat.

## What Should I Do If I Come In Contact With A Bat?

If you are bitten by a bat – or if saliva, brain tissue, or spinal fluid from a bat gets into your eyes, nose, mouth, or a wound – wash the area thoroughly and get medical advice immediately. If possible, capture the bat and send to a laboratory for rabies testing (see: How can I safely capture a bat in my home?).

People usually know when they have been bitten by a bat. However, because bats have small teeth which may leave marks that are not easily seen, in certain cases you should seek medical advice even if you don't see a bite wound. For example, if you awaken and find a bat in your room, see a bat in the room of an unattended child, or see a bat near a mentally impaired or intoxicated person, seek medical advice and have the bat tested.

## What Should I Do If My Pet Is Exposed To A Bat?

If you think your pet or domestic animal has been bitten by a bat, contact a veterinarian or your health department immediately and have the bat tested for rabies. Remember to keep your pets currently vaccinated for rabies by a licensed veterinarian.

## How Can I Safely Capture A Bat In My Home?

If you find a bat in your home and it is possible a person or pet may have been exposed, leave the bat alone and contact animal control or the health department for assistance. If professional help is unavailable, follow these steps to capture the bat safely:

- Find a small box or coffee can, and a piece of cardboard. This will be used to capture the bat.
- Put on leather gloves, and when the bat lands, approach it slowly and place the box or coffee can over it.
- Slide the cardboard under the container to trap the bat inside. Tape the cardboard to the container and punch small holes in the cardboard so the bat can breathe.
- Contact your health department or animal-control authority for rabies testing.

If you see a bat in your home and you are sure no human or pet was exposed, 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 probably leave soon. If not, it can be caught, as described, and released outdoors away from people and pets.

## How Can I Keep Bats Out of My Home?

Some bats live in buildings, and there may be no reason to remove them if there is little chance for contact with people or pets. However, bats should always be prevented from entering rooms of your home. For assistance with "bat-proofing" your home, contact an animal-control or wildlife conservation agency. If you choose to do the "bat-proofing" yourself, here are some suggestions.

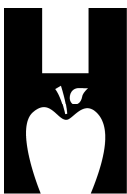
- Carefully examine your home for holes that might allow bats entry into your living quarters. Any openings larger than a quarter-inch by a half-inch should be caulked.
- Use window screens, chimney caps, and draft-guards beneath doors to attics, fill electrical and plumbing holes with stainless steel wool or caulking, and ensure that all doors to the outside close tightly.
- Cover outside entry points with loosely hanging clear plastic sheeting or bird netting. The best time to "bat-proof" your home is in the fall or winter, so as not to trap young bats inside where they may die or make their way into the living quarters.
- For more information about "bat-proofing" your home, contact Bat Conservation International at <http://www.batcon.org/>.

## How Can Rabies Be Prevented?

- Avoid handling bats. Teach children to avoid handling bats and other unfamiliar animals, wild or domestic, even if they appear friendly.
- If you are bitten by a bat, wash the bite wound with soap and water and seek medical attention. Do not release the bat. Contact the local animal control authority or county health department to discuss testing the bat for rabies.
- Vaccinate your animals against rabies to protect yourself, your pets and your community.
- If you think your pet was bitten by a bat or is found playing with a bat, consult your veterinarian.

*This document has been adapted from a document produced on September 28, 2009 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It can be accessed at the website <http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/bats.html>*

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