

## What is rabies?

Rabies is a disease caused by a virus that affects the nervous system of humans and other warm blooded mammals.

## How is rabies spread?

The rabies virus is found only in the brain, spinal cord, and saliva of infected animals. Rabies can be spread through a bite from an infected animal or if any of the tissues or fluids containing the rabies virus comes in contact with 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).

## What is an exposure to rabies?

You can be exposed to rabies from the bite of a rabid animal that breaks the skin. Rabies is also spread 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 confirm 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.

## What should I do if I come in contact with a bat?

If you are bitten by a bat, or think you were bitten when a bat came in direct contact with your skin, wash the bite with soap and water, and try to catch the bat to send in for rabies testing at the OSDH Public Health Lab.

People usually know when they have been bitten by a bat. However, because bats have small teeth which may leave marks that are not easy to see, in certain cases you should seek medical advice even if you do not 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 came in contact with a bat?

If your pet was in direct contact with the bat, such as chewing on a bat, the bat was attached to your pet's skin, or you think your pet came in direct contact with a bat, capture the bat and contact a veterinarian immediately to 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 bitten by the bat, leave the bat alone and contact animal control 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 a veterinarian to euthanize the bat.
- Work with your veterinarian to send in the bat for rabies testing at the OSDH Public Health Lab.

If you see a bat in your home and you are sure no human or pet was in direct contact with the bat, 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?

For assistance with "bat-proofing" your home, contact a professional specializing in bat removal, such as a pest control company. 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/>.



## Key Points

- DO NOT handle 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.
- If bitten, DO NOT release the bat. Capture the bat and contact your veterinarian to euthanize the bat and send in for rabies testing.
- Animals should be vaccinated by a licensed veterinarian 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.

