

Bats & Rabies

Rabies is a serious disease caused by a virus. The virus is carried in the saliva and neural (brain and spinal cord) tissue of infected mammals and is transmitted most commonly through a bite. Only mammals can get rabies and the most frequent carriers in Maine are raccoons, skunks, foxes, and bats. Bat bites are an important source of rabies in people and undetected bat bites have been linked to human rabies cases in the United States. Bats have very small, sharp teeth and a bat bite may be extremely difficult to detect. Here are steps to take if a potential bat exposure occurs.

**What to do if you suspect exposure to a bat:**

1. Any potential exposure to a bat requires a thorough evaluation. Determine if there is any possibility that a person came into contact with the bat. These situations include:
* A bite, scratch, or other direct contact with the bat through a break in the skin or through the mucous membranes of the eyes, nose or mouth.
* A deeply sleeping individual awakens to find a bat in the room, or an adult witnesses a bat in the room with a previously unattended child, mentally disabled person, or intoxicated individual.
1. If there is no possibility that a person came in contact with the bat, it can be allowed to leave on its own - close the room and closet doors, open windows, turn on a light and observe the bat until it leaves.
2. If it is suspected that a bat had close contact with a person, the bat should be captured for rabies testing. Contact a local animal control officer, game warden, or pest management company for assistance. The following technique should be followed to safely capture a bat without damaging its head, as this could prevent rabies testing from being performed.
* Use caution and avoid direct contact with the bat; wear leather gloves if possible
* Wait until it lands, and then cover it with a small box, coffee can, or other container
* Slip a piece of cardboard under the container, thus trapping the bat
* Secure the bat by taping the cardboard tightly to the container
* Wash your hands with soap and water
* Call your local animal control officer, game warden, or pest management personnel to assist in arranging for rabies testing at the Maine Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory (www.mainepublichealth.gov/lab).
1. If it is suspected that a bat had close contact with a person and the bat cannot be captured for testing, rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) may be recommended. Rabies PEP is recommended for all persons with bite, scratch, or mucous membrane exposure to a bat, unless the bat tests negative for rabies. Rabies PEP may be appropriate even in the absence of a demonstrable bite, scratch, or mucous membrane exposure, particularly in situations in which there is reasonable probabilitythat such exposure to a bat may have occurred.

**Summary:**

1. If a suspect exposure occurs, safely capture the bat and submit it for testing.
2. If a suspect exposure occurs and the bat cannot be captured, thoroughly clean the wound and consult with Maine CDC or a healthcare provider. Rabies PEP will be recommended for persons who were bitten or for whom exposure cannot be ruled out.
3. Contact Maine CDC 24/7 by calling 1-800-821-5821 to consult on a potential exposure.