

Maine Public Health Fact Sheet



BAT ENCOUNTERS



Maine Center for Disease
Control and Prevention

An Office of the
Department of Health and Human Services

John E. Baldacci, Governor

Brenda M. Harvey, Commissioner

Where do most common bats roost?

The big brown bat and the little brown bat are the common house bats that roost during spring and summer in attics, behind shutters and in other sheltered areas of human dwellings and outbuildings (barns, garages, etc). In such locations, large numbers of bats, sometimes 500 or more, are often seen, generally in nursery colonies composed of females and, after early June, their young. These bats leave the roost at dusk to feed on flying insects, and may return during the night for a period, and return again in the morning. In the fall, essentially all these bats leave the roost to hibernate in caves and mines for the winter.

Do all bats carry the rabies virus?

No. Most bats are healthy and contribute to our environment in many ways, particularly by consuming insect pests. Less than 1 out of every 200 bats randomly sampled is positive for the rabies virus.

If one bat in the colony is rabid, are all the other bats rabid?

No. One rabid bat in a colony does not mean the entire colony is infected. Testing other members of the colony rarely results in finding another rabid bat.

Can bat rabies be transmitted to other mammals?

Yes. Bat rabies is generally independent from rabies in terrestrial mammals, but transmission from bats to other wildlife, unvaccinated domestic animals and humans can occur. Bat rabies strains have been found in grey foxes, domestic cats and livestock in areas which were otherwise free of terrestrial animal rabies. In those cases, the virus detected in the infected animal was the bat rabies virus.

Can bats transmit rabies without showing signs of sickness?

There is no evidence that bats can transmit rabies for an extended period without being ill. Bats, like other mammals, become sick and eventually die from the disease. Bats infected with rabies may have the virus in their saliva and may transmit the disease to humans and other animals. This type of exposure most commonly occurs through a bite.

How can someone tell whether a bat has rabies?

Rabid bats may show abnormal behavior, such as extended outdoor activity during daylight; rabid bats may be grounded, paralyzed or may bite a person or animal. Not all rabid bats act abnormally, but bats that do are more likely to have rabies.

Do rabid bats attack? Do they usually bite?

Rabid bats rarely attack humans. But, because rabies can occur anywhere and because rabies can be fatal, strictly avoid direct contact with bats. Each contact with a bat should be managed by health authorities.

What should I do if I encounter a bat?

First, determine if there is any possibility that human or domestic animal contact with the bat has occurred. Contact would 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 bat that has been in close proximity to an unattended young child, or a sleeping or impaired person.
- a bat is found in a room with an unattended pet.
- a pet, usually a cat or dog, is found carrying a live or dead bat in its mouth

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If such possibilities cannot be ruled out, **capture the bat**, carefully avoiding direct contact with it and without damaging its head. To capture the bat, close windows, the room and closet doors, turn on dim light if the room is dark, and wait for the bat to land. Wearing gloves, cover the bat with a coffee can or similar container. Slide a piece of cardboard under the can trapping the bat. Tape the cardboard tightly to the can. Immediately contact your local Animal Control Officer to assist in arranging for rabies testing of the bat at the State's Health and Environmental Testing Laboratories in Augusta.

REMEMBER, IF AT ALL POSSIBLE,
CAPTURE THE BAT AND
ARRANGE TO HAVE IT TESTED
FOR RABIES.

What if the bat is not available for testing?

If a bat had close contact with a human and the bat could not be captured for testing, rabies treatment will be recommended. Domestic vaccinated animals will receive a booster dose of vaccine; unvaccinated pets will need to be quarantined for 6 months or euthanized.

If you have confirmed there was no possibility of opportunity for human or domestic animal contact with the bat, it can be allowed to leave on its own, or if it is in your home, it can be released. Close the room and closet doors, open windows, turn on a light and observe the bat until it leaves. If the bat does not leave, wait for it to land, and, wearing gloves, cover it with a coffee can or similar container. Slide a piece of cardboard under the can trapping the bat. Tape the cardboard tightly to the can. If you are certain there was no contact while capturing the bat, release it out of doors, away from populated areas and preferably after dark.

What can be done to keep bats out of a home or other buildings?

Unnecessary killing of bats is not environmentally sound, humane or a permanent solution to the problem. Using chemicals or pesticides creates a risk of long-term toxic exposure to humans and causes sick or dying bats to be grounded in the community, further increasing the chance of contact with people and pets. No toxicant is legally registered for use against bats.

Bats should be kept out of places with a high risk of bat contact with humans or pets (for example, schools, hospitals, prisons, homes) by closing or covering openings that allow entry to the roost. Talk to a professional exterminator or contractor about "bat-proofing".

Go to www.mainepublichealth.gov for more information.

IMPORTANT TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory:
(207) 287-2727
Disease Control Emergency 24 Hour Consultation
(800) 821-5821
Epidemiology Program
(207) 287-5301
State Veterinarian
(207) 287-3701
TTY: 800-606-0215



Department of Health
and Human Services

Maine People Living
Safe, Healthy and Productive Lives

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We are DHHS.*